DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 446 219 CE 080 804

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|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Ronayne, Thomas, Ed. |
| TITLE | Including Prisoners and Ex-Offenders in Employment and Society. Proceedings of the Integra Conference (Dublin, Ireland, November 1998). |
| SPONS AGENCY | European Social Fund, Dublin (Ireland). |
| ISBN | ISBN-1-898148-13-9 |
| PUB DATE | 1999-00-00 |
| NOTE | 104p.; Published by WRC Social and Economic Consultants Ltd. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | Work Research Cooperative Social and Economic Consultants, 4 Lower Ormond Quay, Dublin 1, Ireland, Tel: 353 1 8723100, Fax: 353 1 8723840, E-mail: wrc@iol.ie. |
| PUB TYPE | Collected Works - Proceedings (021) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC05 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Adult Basic Education; Community Involvement; Continuing Education; Correctional Education; *Correctional Rehabilitation; Demonstration Programs; Developed Nations; *Employment Programs; Foreign Countries; Job Search Methods; *Job Training; Outreach Programs; Postsecondary Education; *Prisoners; Vocational Rehabilitation |
| IDENTIFIERS | *England; *Ireland |

ABSTRACT

This book contains proceedings from a conference, held in Dublin, Ireland, on employment of prisoners and ex-offenders, including opening and closing addresses, papers from plenary sessions and summaries from panel sessions and workshops. The opening address, given by John O'Donoghue, is followed by "Including Prisoners and Ex-Offenders in Employment and Society: Overview and Conference Objective" (Tom Ronayne). A summary of a panel session on "What Do We Need to Do to Ensure that Prisoners and Ex-Offenders Are Included in Employment and Society?" is followed by five papers from the plenary session on Pointers to Effective Action. Papers are "The Pathways Project" (Martin Walters); "The Outreach Project" (Colm O'Herlihy); "The MABiS (Model Project--Integration of Training and Employment for Ex-Prisoners) Project" (Wolfgang Wirth); "The JUVOS Project" (Andrea Ward); and "What Works and Why" (Andrew McCall). Summaries from three workshops follow. The workshops examined "Education and Training for Prisoners and Ex-Offenders"; "The Employment of Ex-Offenders"; and "Developing Empowering Practices." The document closes with selected quotations from panel members and a closing address by Paul O'Mahony. (KC)

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EMPLOYMENT
INTEGRA

ED 446 219

# Including Prisoners and Ex-Offenders in Employment and Society

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were supported by the European Social Fund

# Including Prisoners and Ex-Offenders in Employment and Society

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**Proceedings of the Integra Conference**
**Dublin**
**November 1998**

**Integra Support Structure**
**WRC Social and Economic Consultants**

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*Published by*: WRC Social and Economic Consultants Ltd.

ISBN 1 898148 13 9

*First published*: 1999

*Cover design and print*: Quinn Design and Print

*Acknowledgements*: Special thanks to Mr Ismo Gronroos-Saikkala (DG5 European Commission), Ms Olivia O'Leary, Mr Tony Tyrell (Integra National Co-ordinator, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment) for chairing the morning sessions of the conference.

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# 1

# *Opening Addresses*

## Opening Address

## John O'Donoghue, TD, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform

**Introduction**

I am very pleased to have been invited to open your conference here today. I welcome the initiative of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and of the European Union Commission to hold this conference on a theme which I consider very important. I also welcome the interest which you have shown in the theme by coming to participate.

**Promoting Rehabilitation**

In Ireland our policies and our law provide for, among other things, the rehabilitation of offenders. They provide for promoting circumstances in which offenders may stop committing crime and may take steps to lead constructive and law-abiding lives in society. Getting employment, which is a theme of the conference, is a practical and important step for offenders to be able to take in this regard. My Department has programmes in place which aim to encourage and support this. Some of these programmes take place in the prisons and some take place in the community. In most of these the programmes we work in partnership with other people and agencies with whom we provide the services for the offenders. We also work closely with the Courts in these matters.

**Opportune Time**

Today's conference is taking place at a time of considerable opportunity. I acknowledge how appropriate is the timing of

today's event. The prisons building programme which I am undertaking will substantially increase the capacity of the prison system during the next two years. By eliminating the current overcrowding, this will allow meaningful sentence management to take place much more regularly than is possible at present. This will help to strengthen the connections between custody and the world of work for people leaving prison.

Another important opportunity of the present time is our strong national economy. In the past five years we have seen the economy grow by 40 per cent. We have seen our rate of unemployment fall from being about twice the average rate in the European Union to being about the same as the average European Union rate. This sustained economic growth combined with labour market demand provides conditions which favour many of the projects that are being presented here today.

**Challenging Task**

I realise the importance for your projects of having favourable conditions within which to achieve results. I am aware of the challenge and complexity of the tasks in hand. The people for whom you are providing services, the offenders, have many needs. The research which was carried out for my Department in Mountjoy Prison in 1996 is particularly informative in this regard. If I may quote just a single statistic – 80 per cent of the prisoners surveyed had left school before 16 years of age. This compares with a figure of 20 per cent leaving school before 16 years of age in the general population. That statistic alone shows the scale of the challenge you face.

**Conference Project**

Looking at the agenda for your conference I see a very varied group of projects. Some projects take place in prison and some in the community. They involve the public and the voluntary sectors. They cater for people on probation, people in prison and ex-prisoners. It is my hope that from these varied projects we will see best practices being identified which can be applied on a wider

basis in future years. It is important that we see effective linkages being established between the situation of people in custody and their getting jobs after release.

**CONNECT Project**

From the point of view of my own Department, we are addressing this issue through the CONNECT project which is being presented in one of the workshops of today's conference. We are finding answers to important questions through this process ourselves. We are conducting this project in collaboration with the National Training and Development Institute of the Rehab Group. We are finding this collaboration most helpful. I have the further hope that your conference may help to identify more areas for fruitful co-operation and collaboration between the public and voluntary sectors and with the business community.

**Social Inclusion**

The title of your conference is "Including prisoners and ex-offenders in employment and society". As you know the Government has entered a commitment under Partnership 2000 aimed at taking action for greater social inclusion. I will quote a short passage from the Partnership 2000 document:

> *Social exclusion is one of the major challenges currently facing Irish society. To minimise or ignore this challenge would not only result in social polarisation, which is in itself unacceptable, but also an increase in all the attendant problems such as poor health, crime, drug abuse and alienation which impose huge social and economic costs on our society.*
>
> *Social inclusion will therefore be pursued not in any residual way, but rather as an integral part of this Partnership and a strategic objective in its own right. The primary objective of a social inclusion strategy is to ensure that the benefits of economic growth, and related social improvements, are shared by all*

*sections of the Irish population. Access to jobs is a key to this.*

**Supporting Offenders**

Let me say that my Department is endeavouring, in a concerted way, to address the issues surrounding prisoners and ex-offenders and their successful preparation for employment.

My Department, through its own services and through the agencies who work with us, aims to give support to the offenders and opportunities for learning new skills. However, I recognise that it is the offenders themselves who must avail of these opportunities and derive benefit from that support. This is a central point and it is being examined closely in my Department's CONNECT project. It is the offenders who are the primary agents in their own rehabilitation. My Department and the services for which it is responsible will go to great lengths to encourage offenders to undertake programmes. It is my sincere hope that very large numbers of offenders will respond positively. And for those who do respond positively it is my intention that they will receive all reasonable support in stopping their criminal activity and in getting employment. I expect that the work of your conference today will help to further these efforts and I wish you a successful conference.

# Including Prisoners and Ex-Offenders in Employment and Society: Overview and Conference Objectives

**Tom Ronayne**
**Integra National Support Structure**

## Introduction

The aim of Integra is to find new and effective ways of improving the employability and labour market situation of people excluded or at risk of exclusion from employment and society. Among the priority groups of people that Integra is concerned with are prisoners and ex-offenders. During the 1995 to 1997 period approximately 40 of the 480 projects in Integra across the EU were working with prisoners and ex-offenders (i.e., just over 8 per cent). In the current round of Integra, operating over 1998 to 1999, approximately 200 projects are in some way concerned with prisoners and ex-offenders (i.e., almost 20 per cent), though it is likely that a much smaller percentage is actually dealing with prisoners and ex-offenders as their main priority.

The projects currently underway are being implemented by a wide range of organisations - Ministries of Justice, Probation Services, Prison Administrations, Education and Training Organisations, and Non-Governmental Organisations. A feature of many of the projects is the development of consortia or partnerships that involve different types of organisations coming together – both nationally and transnationally - to co-ordinate their work and harness their respective expertise and resources. Many of these are attempting to build linkages between the range of statutory and non-statutory organisations whose activities and services impact on the lives and employment chances of prisoners and ex-offenders. The actions they are piloting are diverse and include

basic skills programmes, in and out of prison education and training programmes, assessment and individual programme planning, guidance and counselling services, employment placement and support services etc. Today, at this conference, even within the relatively small selection of nine Integra projects, this diversity of approach and practice will be highlighted.

Before outlining the objectives of the conference it is useful to briefly outline some features of the current situation in relation to prisoners and ex-offenders in Ireland and to identify some of the difficulties arising in relation to achieving their inclusion in employment and society.

**Prisons and Prisoners in Ireland**

The following are some of the main features of the Irish prison system and the circumstances of the prison population.

- there are 14 prisons / places of detention in Ireland currently providing approximately 2,800 prison places – a further 1,000 places are planned for 1999;
- the numbers of people employed in the prison service, at almost 2,500, is approximately equivalent to the number of prisoners;
- the cost of a prison place is £46,500 a year – this is among the highest in Europe;
- expenditure in 1998 on prison services including Probation and Welfare is estimated at £183 million;
- on any one day there are approximately 2,500 people in prison and, of these, just about 2% are women;
- approximately two thirds of the prison population are under 30 years of age and just over one quarter are between the ages of 17 and 21 years;
- the majority of people who go to prison are from communities and households where poverty and social deprivation are commonplace (e.g., Paul O'Mahony found that just over 60 per cent of prisoners in Mountjoy had a father who was persistently unemployed and just over one in seven had a parent who had been imprisoned);

- the majority – about three quarters - of prisoners are early-school leavers and a substantial number have literacy / numeracy difficulties;
- a substantial number prisoners have addiction problems and for many their crimes are related to maintaining this;
- over half – in the region of 55% - of those in prison at any given time are serving sentences for crimes against property (over half of these involved violence);
- the number of committals (i.e., the number being sent to prison on remand or upon conviction) is currently of the order of 11,500 a year;
- just over half of people in prison are serving sentences of over two years;
- estimates of recidivism range from a minimum of 50 per cent to in the region of 80 per cent – depending on age profile, type of crime etc.

**Some Aspects of the Problem**

Reflecting the above figures there is widespread agreement that the system of criminal justice in Ireland is not working. In fact, many would argue that it is in crisis. There is a high reliance on prisons and a comparative lack of alternative non-custodial sentences. The majority of prisoners re-offend on release. Prisons at present are meeting neither the needs of society for security nor the prisoner for a second chance – for a chance of a life without crime.

> *Imprisoning offenders has not been a successful approach to reducing the problem of crime. Certainly if one of its purposes is to rehabilitate offenders and reduce re-offending it has failed dramatically.* (Expert Review Group on the Probation and Welfare Services- First Report, p. 7, 1998)

People sent to prison in Ireland come predominantly from households and communities experiencing multiple social and economic disadvantages. Unemployment and the absence of a social infrastructure are common features. Since the 1980s these

communities have experienced cycles of heroin addiction, predominantly among young people. In the absence of realistic alternatives many of these have become involved in crime to support their addiction. In effect, society ends up sending many people to prison because of the failures of social institutions to enable people to successfully avoid crime in the first place. Once in prison there is an absence of any substantial effort to prepare people for a life without crime on release. For many people sent to prison, this compounds previous disadvantage.

**What has Integra to Contribute?**

At the risk of some over-simplification I would suggest that there are three key lessons emerging across all the projects in relation to what is required to achieve the inclusion of prisoners and ex-offenders in employment and society. These are:

- the need for co-ordinated action on the part of the wide range of statutory and non-statutory organisations working with prisoners and ex-offenders;
- the need for substantial development in the area of basic education as a platform for accessing mainstream education and training; and,
- the need for a strong system of support to actually enable ex-offenders access employment.

I am sure that during the various presentations, workshops and discussions these messages will be illustrated with tangible examples of actions and progress. Crosscutting all of these is the need to actively involve prisoners and ex-offenders in the process of identifying solutions.

**Conference Objectives**

Finally, in terms of the way we have organised this conference, we see it as operating at a number of levels and achieving a number of objectives.

First, the conference is bringing together key people involved in the criminal justice system to discuss the issue of why the system is failing and to identify what can be done to improve it. These include prison governors, offenders and ex-offenders, senior officials in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, teachers and trainers in prisons, and groups and organisations in the voluntary and community sectors working with offenders and ex-offenders. In this way the conference aims to provide a forum for an exchange of views and experiences.

Second, an important input to the Conference is the lessons that are being generated by Integra projects. Nine Integra projects will be actively involved in the Conference. Five of these are from Ireland, two from Germany and two from the UK. In addition, there is one further ESF funded project - the *Dillon's Cross Project*. This is funded under the Women's Education Initiative (WEI) in Ireland. We have asked these projects to share their experiences and insights with the other participants. The main objective here is to identify and highlight the key lessons for policy and practice.

Third, through the involvement of offenders and ex-offenders in the conference - particularly in the opening panel discussion and in the workshops - we hope to provide an illustration of working in an empowering manner. We see this as about promoting the active involvement of people in defining the nature of their problems as they experience them and in devising solutions to these problems. Working in an empowering manner involves recognising that people have insights into their situation that are an important resource to be mobilised in developing effective solutions and policies.

Finally, by including a workshop focusing specifically on Developing Empowering Practices, we hope to establish clear links with and contribute to the work of the Integra Thematic Group at an EU level. This group is examining the nature and role of the empowering practices and their relevance to combating social exclusion.

# 2

## *Panel Session*

## Panel Session

**Extracts from a panel discussion on the question of: *What do we need to do to ensure that prisoners and ex-offenders are included in employment and society?***

Chair: Olivia O'Leary

Participants: Valerie Bresnihan (*Irish Penal Reform Trust*)
Jason Bollard (*Pathways*)
David Donovan (*Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform – Probation and Welfare*)
Martin Hickey (*Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform – Work and Training*)
Seán Óg Hurley (*Dubarry Shoes*)
John Lonergan (*Governor, Mountjoy Prison*)
Michael O'Riordan (*Connect Project*)

**David Donovan (*Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform - Probation and Welfare Service*)**

The Probation and Welfare Service is the agency with primary responsibility for the re-integration of offenders into the community. This involves work at individual and societal levels to counter the exclusion and stigmatisation that can be productive of further crime. We have a long tradition and a corporate ethos of purposeful intervention towards this end, not only with prisoners during and on release from custody, but also with those - far more numerous - who are placed by court order under supervision in the community to address their offending behaviour.

This requires efforts on many fronts. Offenders themselves have to accept responsibility for their own behaviour and recognise

their obligations to others. They also need to change and leave behind the attitudes and behavioural patterns that have led to crime, with appropriate help from specialised agencies where necessary. Those who grew up or are coming to maturity in unhappy or deprived circumstances have to be assisted to overcome such handicaps and, in particular, to make good any deficits in their education or preparation for work. Supervision in the community utilises local facilities and resources. It gives offenders the means and opportunity to re-enter or realistically begin to access the labour market by encouraging them to take advantage of training, support and other measures to tackle their unemployment. This is particularly true of early school leavers who often lack not just skills but initiative and self-confidence. Involvement in criminality can marginalise them even further.

The Probation and Welfare Service has developed a number of training workshops for offenders who would otherwise have critically reduced prospects of achieving stability and re-integration. Most of these facilities are operated by local management committees that are supported and resourced by the Probation and Welfare Service.

In our experience, however, the lifestyles of young people in some disadvantaged neighbourhoods inhibits their chances of obtaining or continuing in satisfactory employment. So, specific projects have been established, with the support of FÁS and the VECs, that provide a substantial programme to address these lifestyle issues and to prepare participants for the disciplined world of work. We acknowledge the significant backing from the European Union which has enabled us to initiate these innovative developments.

For this conference today we have invited some employers and former offenders to share their experiences with you. As our customers, they are best positioned to speak on what is presently being done and what more is required. So I would look forward to hearing their contribution along with that of others during the day.

**Jason Bollard (*Pathways*)**

*Pathways* was initiated by the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) and funded under the Integra programme. The aim of *Pathways* is to provide for the educational and social re-integration of prisoners and ex-prisoners.

I come from one of those socially deprived areas where I didn't really get a chance when I was a young fella. I was brought up in a family where crime was acceptable. It just kept on happening. I kept on going back to prison all the time, re-offending. I got probation and stuff like that loads of times. I always seemed to be alright once I was under some sort of supervision, but when I was left to my own devices I always got back involved with my old friends, back involved with drugs, back involved in crime and back to prison.

I just kept on going in and out. I didn't want to change, really. Nobody was behind me to give me a push or give me advice on where to go, what to do if I wanted to get training or education. This time I took it into my own hands and I got involved in *Pathways* because I didn't want to go back to prison. I wanted to change. It was very hard, you know. It's not just the employment side of it. You've to leave your old life behind you, your old friends, and all of that. So that's another obstacle you come up against.

The way I see it is that *Pathways* changed my thinking, and I think that's the way to go. You have to try and change people's thinking and attitudes about prison officers and authority figures. I had a problem with that for a long time. I actually changed my own thinking. But I had people that believed in me, that gave me support, especially in *Pathways* where I went when I was released. When I started I'd no real goals, I still didn't want a job or anything like that when I went to Pathways at first. All I wanted was to stay out of prison. I sort of made my own opportunities and people saw that I was committed to staying out of prison and they gave me all the support that I needed.

I used to have this thing in my head that you needed all this money and all this stuff. You don't, you know. I've worked on a Community Employment scheme for £87 a week for the last nine months and I really enjoy the job.

I was locked up since I was eleven, down in Clonmel, and anytime I did go for an interview it was always on my CV - the question, *how come you go to school in St Joseph's in Clonmel?* I couldn't explain that because my family was from Dublin so I didn't get the job. I got disheartened and I just turned back to the old way again, you know. I'd go back robbing, or I'd go back using drugs again. It was like a wheel all the time, back into prison. I just didn't want to do anything. But this time there was support - basic support - there when I got out.

We have to start challenging the thinking of offenders and supporting them to change their thinking. I was one of them for many years, walking around the yard, talking about the same stuff every day, talking about what you robbed or who you're gonna rob when you get out. We never gave school a chance in Mountjoy, or the workshops. I always thought that they were pointless. You'd go in and you'd learn something and you got no certification for it.

Now, I do classes in *Pathways*, computers and stuff like that. I get certification for all that and I know that it'll stand to me in the future. That is helping me to try and get on with me life and leave me old pattern of life behind me. But it was possible only because there was a place where I could go to this time when I got out. There was nothing ever there for prisoners. *Pathways* was somewhere where I fitted in and everybody was the same, they were looking for the one thing - to stay out of prison and maybe get employment. I have got employment and I'm very happy today. But I wouldn't be here, I'd probably be up in Mountjoy, if it wasn't for *Pathways*.

**Seán Óg Hurley (*Dubarry Shoes*)**

Dubarry Shoes employ 215 people in Ballinasloe and is one of 15 or 16 employers in the area who take trainees from the Ballinasloe Training Workshop.

The Ballinasloe business and industrial community has reason to be grateful for the way in which the Training Workshop has proved to be an asset to our recruitment programmes. None of the employers involved have any difficulty in recommending the Workshop as a very efficient way of recruiting people for employment.

In the earlier years, the Workshop personnel had to coax and cajole employers to take on trainees. The situation now is that employers are using the Training Workshop as a means of recruiting people with skills and the proper attitude to working. Nowadays I ask the Workshop if they have one or two people, good people, to give me a tip-off when they're ready to leave the Workshop. I would say the other employers in the area are doing the same thing. They are trying to get the young people, the good people, in their direction as well. Many employers have taken on trainees with quality skills from the Workshop and have eventually seen them progress to full-time employment in their firms. While this has obvious advantages for the employer, it must also provide an added inspiration or a role model for trainees who are commencing their work experience or their training programme.

The level of service and support offered to employers by the Training Workshop has been very professional. It sees the needs of the employer and matches these with the specific development of skills of the trainees. A significant element of flexibility and regular monitoring have been key aspects of the service. It has been one of the most successful public/private partnerships between education and business over the past two decades in our community.

In my own company we take trainees on in two ways. We take them on for work experience for a period of time and then, hopefully and eventually, as full-time employees. We know before they come to us that they're under the supervision of the Probation and Welfare Service and have been before the courts. We believe that the opportunity being given to these young people is very beneficial to them, as in a lot of cases it means they can be kept out of prison, which have a damaging effect on them.

Jason mentioned the problems that he experienced with his CV. I think, if I were to be honest as an employer, it is far easier for me to recruit somebody from the Training Workshop before they've gone on to prison than recruit them afterwards when they come out of prison.

From dealing with the trainees in the Ballinasloe Workshop, we can see how the staff, with their obvious skills, have helped the trainees to build up their confidence and self-esteem. Follow-up support is provided, both to the trainee / employee and ourselves as an employer, long after the trainee has left the workshop.

I believe one of the messages going out from the conference should be that the Government should make a lot more resources available for community-based projects as it makes an awful lot more sense to keep people in their own community.

Ballinasloe Workshop recently celebrated their 21st Anniversary and over the last year has had a 78 per cent placement rate into full-time jobs. This is indicative of how successful training workshops can be in the community. It was a great sense of pride to me that one of those trainees eventually achieved the status of shop steward within our workforce. In Dubarry's history, a shop steward is half way there to being a supervisor with the company. That's the situation as an employer in Ballinasloe. As I say, our recommendation is that money would be invested in the training workshops so that we keep young people out of jails. As I said to you, 15 or 16 employers in the Ballinasloe area have no difficulty at all in recruiting them into full-time employment.

**Michael O Riordan (*Connect Project*)**

We're doing this project now in the jail – the *Connect Project*. I've just started.

What are the problems prisoners have? Most prisoners get out with just a bag over their shoulders. Most of them have nowhere to go, no money in their pockets. They've nothing else to do but to go back robbing straight away to get money to keep them going. I asked the prisoners in the project before I came out here to speak at this conference what would help them. They said education, information on where to go, what to do when you get out. These are things that we don't have. You just get out with your bag.

The hardest part is when you get out the gate. If you don't have somewhere to go and if you don't have money, you're gonna have to rob. You get out, you're waiting two or three weeks to get money off the Welfare, what are you gonna do for the two or three weeks that you have no money?

When prisoners are inside you have to change the attitudes of the prisoners, get them involved in courses, training. It's pointless leaving them uninformed. They're just gonna come back straightaway.

**Martin Hickey (*Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform – Work and Training*)**

In 1994 the Department published a written policy statement for the prisons which was followed, in 1997, by a document called *Tackling Crime*. This gave rise to the Consultative Forum about crime issues. Those documents together and other work that's going on in the Department, I would submit, signify that the Department wants to develop policy, wants to put it into the public domain, and wants to co-ordinate its programmes and be more effective.

The project that we're engaged in, in connecting the situation of people in custody with the world at work, has a number of approaches. The Minister spoke in terms of co-ordinating within the prison service and within the Probation and Welfare Service. There are substantial resources available to address these things - education, training, support in the community and support through workshops such as the Ballinasloe Workshop and many others. There are many resources and part of the challenge is to co-ordinate these, to be quite targeted and to make the connections from custody out to the world at work. Thus, co-ordinating is one of the things that we are addressing.

But another crucial issue is offenders' responses to these programmes. It begins with the offender, it begins with where he or she is at, and what he or she is going to do about their future. The programmes really need to know that and to respond to that. Within our research, we're attempting to get an understanding of the motivation of the person who's in prison. It's a matter of knowing how to present the programmes so that there's a strong likelihood of take-up. It's a matter of needing to engage offenders and hoping that they will find that they can engage fully in the process - needing them to be well informed about what choices are ahead for them, needing them to be able to take ownership for the road ahead of them.

From the Department of Justice's perspective, this is the core issue to get right at this stage. We are doing that at a time of immense opportunity, at a time when there are real jobs out in the economy, a growing and vibrant economy, and at a time when a lot of the disorder and chaos that has affected the prisons in recent years is likely to stop.

**Valerie Bresnihan (*Irish Penal Reform Trust*)**

The Irish Penal Reform Trust is a voluntary organisation that is committed to advocating a humane, accountable, penal system and respect for the basic human rights of prisoners. I have just seven

recommendations which, in our various submissions to the Government, we have made at one time or other.

First of all, I should say that we believe prisoners are damaged people. There is plenty of evidence to support this. There is international survey after international survey to say that prisons, on the whole, despite the good intentions of many who work in them, do not do prisoners a great deal of good. I think, most importantly, they tend to facilitate a prisoner seeing society as the enemy. We had a conference on women prisoners very recently and an ex-prisoner, now working in *Pathways*, made an important point. Because all little children love their mothers anybody who takes their mother away from them, such as the prison system, actually ensures that small children, from a very early age, see society as the enemy and will not co-operate with society. So we need to at least begin to decrease this natural dynamic.

A starting point is the provision of a full-time Inspector of Prisons. We are one of the very few countries in Europe that have no Inspector of Prisons, thus no-one who has the responsibility to defend the rights of prisoners.

The second recommendation concerns visiting committees. They have the reputation for being very passive and being politically affiliated. Thus, they can be intimidated, very often, by the prison system. They neither defend prisoners' rights nor do they report what is actually going on. These are two recommendations that we feel would at least diminish the perception, indeed the fact, that society is the enemy for people who are put in prison.

The third recommendation is to have a full assessment procedure for every prisoner who goes into prison. Because prisons are not good for people, at some stage in a prisoner's sentence - when they become a low risk - it should be possible to recommend that they go out into a community enterprise and there learn the skills of work. Of course, in order for this to happen, there must be structured and accountable rehabilitative services. Now, regrettably, it's one of the dynamics of prison life, that services for the poor are always poor and services for the very poor, who

are the people that are usually in prison, tend to be very poor indeed.

We also recommend that prison governors, in particular, be given much more planning power and a greater say in what happens prisoners as they serve their sentence.

We have called for a Director of Sentence Planning and Rehabilitation as one of the head of functions in the new Prison Agency. Unfortunately, there is no head of function purely dedicated to assisting people to get back out into the world of work or even just into society. The Director of Sentence Planning and Rehabilitation could oversee rehabilitation and ensure a system of rehabilitation and early release. This would be a very new way of looking at the prison system because without a Director of Sentence Planning and Rehabilitation, prisons will be nothing more than security, and that, in itself, is damaging.

Ireland is one of the very few countries that do not have an Independent Parole Board. There is a Sentence Review Group but they only consider whether prisoners will be released after seven years despite the fact that the average sentence - the average time spent in prison - is two years. An Independent Parole Board would start reviewing prisoners once the governor, the evaluation system and the Director of Sentence Planning and Rehabilitation have all dialogued with each other so that a decision could then be taken to release prisoners as early as possible, depending on the prisoner's needs and on their willingness to participate.

All the recommendations that will be made today are based on common sense and they are based, I think, ultimately on finding ways to reduce crime. It is a harsh fact of life that prisons ultimately do not decrease crime. I think we have to ask ourselves why is it so believable that prison is seen as a means of actually curing crime. We've got 2000 places without any research done, without any sort of proof that it will cure crime. The fact is that building more prison places - and this is well supported by international evidence - does not actually cure crime or even overcrowding in prisons. The more prison places there are, the

more people will be sent to prison. Extra prison places will not, regrettably, decrease crime and that is a great problem for those who work very hard in the prison system to try and reintegrate prisoners.

Finally, I would like to ask what does prison, or what does a solution to crime via prison conjure up? It conjures up very powerful symbols like steel prison bars, clanging gates, high grey walls and large heavy key-rings swinging from the hips of burly officers. Yet all the common-sense recommendations that will be made today have nothing to do with those images. But if I ask you what sort of image does rehabilitation, does restorative justice conjure up? By restorative justice I mean giving the victim a say in talking to a prisoner as to how to repay the harm or damage they have done. There are no comparative images. There may be images of wishy-washy liberals soft on crime. We cannot begin to think without first identifying symbols. We have very powerful symbols that actually give us permission to think unquestionably about the so-called solution to crime. I've just mentioned four symbols. We have none for restorative justice or rehabilitation. In addition, there is almost little or no money put aside for any of the suggestions that will be made today.

**John Lonergan (*Governor of Mountjoy Prison*)**

The problems do not start in prison, they start in the community. They start with attitudes in the community, including those of employers, teachers, politicians, the media and a whole lot of other powerful influences.

Once people go to prison they've already experienced quite an amount of damage and disadvantage. Take education, for example. Educational levels are very poor when you look at the population in Mountjoy. For instance, as evidenced by the studies conducted by Dr Paul O'Mahony in 1986 and 1996. Instead of things improving throughout that decade, they have disimproved.

There are real needs out in the community. It's about attitudes generated and conditioned into people living in the deprived areas - mainly of our cities - and it's our attitudes towards those areas also. Why do we sustain them, why do we keep sustaining ghettos all around Dublin and Cork and Limerick when we know that huge numbers of young people are destroyed ever before they get out of them. We keep doing that, whether we do it consciously or sub-consciously it doesn't matter.

Having said that, you have to focus on the capacity of the individual when he or she arrives in prison. It is difficult sometimes to listen to what people's real needs are and to identify what capacity have they to undergo this huge change that will give them the necessary skills for employment. Employers are going to be very selfish. There's very few of them going to take people on for the sake of taking them on. They'll want work done, they'll want to get something for their money. Unless a person has something to contribute in the workforce, he or she will not be employable. However, employment is not the be all and end all. But it is a major part of people's dignity because most people, I believe, like to be self-sustaining, to be able to keep themselves and their family. If they haven't got a job there's a big vacuum.

But for many, many prisoners, it's not the be all and end all because they have other major difficulties as well, and that's one of the strengths of the *Connect Project* in Mountjoy. It is identifying needs in a holistic manner, looking at the whole person, rather than just equipping them, maybe fairly narrowly, for a job. This requires teamwork. It requires all the different agencies working together to try and help the prisoner. If you identify the prisoner's needs by asking the prisoner, then your job is to respond to those needs as best you can. That involves teamwork and I think one of the early successes of the *Connect Project* is that teamwork is beginning to develop and people are working very well together. It involves the discipline staff, the workshop staff, the Probation and Welfare Service, the educationalists working in the prison, and employers in the community. But it would be wrong to give the impression that it's

a simplistic thing. It's a very complex long-term project to rehabilitate people.

This task is further complicated by problems like homelessness, drug addiction and peer pressure from other prisoners. Two-thirds of the population of Mountjoy have a chronic drug addiction. Most of it, 99 per cent of it, was developed in the community. There is a huge pressure on people to conform to the type of lifestyle that they had before they came into prison. There's huge pressure on them in prison to conform to the same image in prison. There's a lot of pressure not to get involved, indeed you are considered a sissy if you get involved too much in the system.

So there are huge issues to be dealt with. But, for me, the biggest issue is on the outside. How are we going to stop people coming into the system at all? I think that we don't put enough resources into that. It's a cop-out really to say we need to start working with people in prison. We need to start working with people before they go to prison. I know already there's lots and lots of work being done, for instance, by the Probation and Welfare Service and by other agencies in the community. But all those people will tell you that their resources are almost nil on the ground, that they just don't have the resources. We need to begin by putting into place the professional supports in our disadvantaged areas before we start looking after our more well off and articulate people.

I read recently about a survey of young people in Ballyfermot, young people aged of 16, 17 and 18, in school and out of school. They were asked what were the three or four things they associate with teenagers in Ballyfermot / Chapelizod. They answered the following. The first thing they said was alcohol. The second was drugs. The third thing was crime. The fourth thing they said was teenage pregnancies. The final point, which is a challenge to employers, they asked them do you think you'll get work when you leave school. Seventy three per cent said they didn't think they'd get work. Then they said – and why won't you get work? Seventy three per cent felt that because they came from Ballyfermot / Chapelizod, they would not be employable because employers would not give them a job.

At least the *Connect Project* is a start. It responds to the needs of the client in the prison and it tries to connect the prisons and the people in prison with the wider community through employment. But there's a lot more to be done.

**Question and Answer Session**

**Olivia O'Leary:** Is it true that employers are very slow to employ people who have been in prison? What about the social conscience of employers when it comes to doing what seems to be so very important in terms of including people in society, that is to give people who have been in prison a job?

**Seán Óg Hurley:** Employers do certainly have reservations. They are concerned that prisoners will fit in with other employees. They are concerned that they might upset other employees by taking on somebody who has a record. That is why it is important to build positive attitudes in the community. That is being fostered, certainly in Ballinasloe. It is being fostered by the relationship with the Training Workshop, whereby employers begin to understand what is being done and become aware that what the Workshop is trying to do is stop people from going into prison.

The next step in relation to employer responsibility is to the individual that they employ. For example, what do we do when somebody who has been taken on from a training workshop and who has proven to be a very good worker gets back involved in crime and winds up in prison? I think we, as employers, when that person comes out, would see a certain sense of responsibility towards that person and should give that person a chance - a job.

**Olivia O'Leary:** What can prisoners or ex-offenders do or say that will persuade an employer that she or he should take a chance?

**Seán Óg Hurley:** They have got to convince the employer that they are beneficial. We've got to feel that we're getting value for

money. Any person who has a record has to convince us that they were not afraid to get involved, to participate in training programmes in prison, and they're not afraid of being classified as a sissy by their peers. They have to be able to say – "Look, I'm trying to make a new start for myself. I've done x, y & z in Mountjoy. I've spent so many months there but I've gone back to school, I've done the classes inside and now I'm prepared to try and break from my past". That is what they need to do, to convince the employer that they're serious about that.

**Olivia O'Leary: How easy is that for someone who is in prison or has been in prison?**

**Jason Bollard:** Very, very hard. You know, I've actually got a job in the last three months but that was after a lot of hard slogging on my behalf. I didn't go back robbing and that meant living on meagre money. Before I always thought I needed loads of money, I don't. I got a job three weeks ago with the Eastern Health Board. It's the first real opportunity or job I was given.

You do get disheartened after years and years of trying to get jobs. It wasn't that I just went back to robbing all the time, I didn't. I tried a few times to change. But once they see the CV, where it says where I went to school, and once they ask what you've been doing for the last few years, they don't want to employ you.

Another point is that ex-prisoners get the bottom bracket jobs, all the - if you don't mind me cursing - the shitty jobs. They're all there for ex-prisoners. It's like society creates a workforce for underprivileged people, or socially excluded people.

But, it is also up to yourself, at the end of the day, you can keep going back into Mountjoy, and I did for so many years. For years I used to let my record of what I did in the past haul me back, but today I want to get on with life and there are a lot of other people that do as well. It's just having someone to actually believe you and give you a chance. If you keep on getting told no, well then, you're going to build up resentments and grudges against society as a whole, so you'll just go back and you'll rob.

**Michael O'Riordan:** When I got out the first time, in 1994, I went for the job in XXX and I admitted that I was in prison and that was it, forget about it. It's not just the attitudes of prisoners that need to change, it's the attitudes of employers. Because, I had interviews, I really got disheartened. You're going in and they're asking where have you been, what have you been doing for the last few months. Oh, I was in prison and that is the end of that. You just get fed up. You're there every week, no money, after getting shot down in interviews and you end up going off robbing for the few pound like.

Attitudes have to be changed and there have to be supports there. I agree there is an image in prison, you have to have an image and you feel you can't be running into the Welfare every day. But you have to want to change. You have to try. That's the most important thing, to me anyway, you have to want to change. I have a six year old son and I've another child on the way. My son has been coming to see me for the last couple of years. I don't want my other baby to come and see me in prison. I want a better life for myself and I want to be able to provide a better life for them. So I'm doing this *Connect Project* now. I've done two other courses and I have just done a course, this weekend in the jail, an Alternative to Violence Programme.

**Audience:** I'd just like to make a comment on what has been said because I think this whole issue of employment for offenders is very important.

Prison is damaging to offenders and we have to be fair to prisoners before we start thinking about putting them into employment. I don't think that any offender, any prisoner, or very few prisoners are ready for employment direct from prison. When we lock people up we damage their confidence and self-esteem. So we have to prepare them for employment and we must give a person time to build up their confidence and self-esteem after they leave prison. In my experience this takes at least one, if not two years. The only way we can do this is to have the facilities and training in the community to allow them to build up their confidence and self-esteem and then to have a period of work

experience for them. One way is to provide support services that help prisoners to get work experience. That gives the offender or the ex-prisoner the opportunity to build up their confidence and self-esteem and to fit into the community. Then the employer can take them on and give them full-time employment.

**Audience:** I would like to know from the people that have been in prison, which did you find worse prejudice against the drugs history or the crime history when trying to find employment and what supports have you got in place now while you're in full-time employment?

**Jason Bollard:** Both. It wasn't just my criminal record, it was the fact that I was a drug addict for a lot of years. I just wasn't employable. My own family couldn't trust me. So how do you expect an employer to trust you?

What supports do I have outside? In my employment at the moment, I have the same supports as when I got out initially from Mountjoy with me fiver and me black bag and nowhere to go. The staff in *Pathways* project helped me build up my confidence, my self-esteem.

I was in prison for a long time, or going in and out for a long time. And after being told you're a piece of shit for so long you just start to believe it. These people had faith in me, and didn't tell me I was a piece of shit. They told me that I could get on with life and I have a lot of support in the job today. I still do work on my drug problem I see a counsellor. I've that to deal with as well as providing a living for my family. I tried for years to do it the hard way and I was always the eejit going in and out of jail.

I don't mind getting up every morning now at 8 o'clock in the morning and going out, and I look forward to going to work. That is a big difference for me. I used to be looking forward to going out and getting me bag of heroin or whatever the case may be. It's the total opposite now. I enjoy going to work. I enjoy helping other people. And they're people like me, you know, ex-prisoners. Going down to *Pathways*, I was afraid at first to make

the change - as has been said, to be seen as a sissy - and that was my attitude for a long time. I didn't want to be seen as a sissy, to conform to the authority's way. I've learned it the hard way. You're better off, well for me I'm better off getting on with me life.

But there is also the whole issue of accommodation when you get out, and social welfare rights, stuff like that. I deal with these sort of things on a daily basis. If you have a prisoner in Mountjoy or anywhere else in Ireland and they have a drug problem, or they have some sort of problem, if they get out and there's no one to help them, no information, it's just the five pound and your black bag with your clothes in it. Then there's not much hope.

**Olivia O'Leary:** Are you saying that people leaving Mountjoy Prison need a re-entry programme to slowly reintegrate back into employment and housing and deal with all of those issues that come up for you?

**Jason Bollard:** At least 60 per cent of the people I deal with on a daily basis actually get out of prison with nowhere to live, no support from their families, some of them don't have any connections with their family or anything else. So they are getting out, they cannot get a flat. It's not very easy to get a flat in Dublin, whether you're an ex-prisoner or not. You get £180 from the Social Welfare towards a deposit for a flat, so you're coming from a ghetto into another ghetto. The sort of accommodation you'd get for £180 isn't very good, it's sort of the lowest of the low, it's even worse than Mountjoy in some cases.

But, that's what you face. You have people getting out with drug habits or with drug problems. They might have tried to address that issue while they were in prison and then they end up back on the streets with no support. The only thing that *Pathways* can suggest is that they go to a hostel for the homeless and in most of the hostels there's drug use, there's thieving, you get all walks of life. So I think there should be houses or hostels for ex-prisoners where if people prove their commitment while they're in prison,

doing some thing like the Connect Programme or going through the pre-release course, people can go for help.

**Olivia O'Leary:** John (Lonergan), you get handed people and you're told lock them up, keep them away. Society wants them out of the way. Do you feel a sense of despair when you see them walk out the gate and you know that there isn't the support system there? You know that society which has expected you both to keep them out of the way and to rehabilitate them isn't doing enough to make sure that they're not back inside those gates within a year?

**John Lonergan:** Well, I wouldn't say I get frustrated with it. It gives me most of my energy fighting that particular system. Eighty eight per cent of prisoners in Mountjoy were unemployed immediately before they were committed to prison. That's a massive difficulty straight away. So it's not a matter of the effect of coming in. I would say self-esteem has been badly damaged ever before most people come into prison, that right throughout their growing up their self-esteem was damaged and maybe low self-esteem was a major contributory factor to their addiction, to their criminal activities, to the breakdown in their relationships.

There are no supports really. I mean, there are some projects as we have heard here today but they are so tiny. It's the same with drug addiction. Two-thirds of the prison population in Mountjoy at the moment are chronic drug addicts. The latest survey in yesterday's paper said that there are 13,000 drug addicts in Dublin. If that is the case, then we do not have the facilities out there to provide treatment, not maintenance. Maintenance is a very important part but it's not treatment and it's not changing people's lifestyles in the sense that they're now drug free. Homelessness, there are about 80 people at any one time in Mountjoy, men, and maybe 12 to 14 / 15 women homeless. There are no facilities out there, for us anyway, to tap into. If someone has HIV or Hepatitis and he's homeless, nobody wants to know. And when somebody does something about it in the community, like we have at the moment St Vincent De Paul trying to do something about accommodation, there's huge local opposition.

So we need a huge educational programme to change attitudes in society.

It is linked to general perceptions. I would say that there is a bias against people that are poor and disadvantaged at the moment. We are in a society where the emphasis is on success, where you get all your brownie marks for being successful. You get no recognition for working with the disadvantaged. So there's a huge, huge job to be done.

**Olivia O'Leary:** Are you saying that ideally you'd prefer that you were out of a job, that there were no prisons at all?

**John Lonergan:** No. Some people will decide that they're going to be criminal anyway. And I must say that I have very little sympathy for them if they started off on a level playing pitch and they decided, quite deliberately, that I'm going to be a criminal because I'm going to get a good lifestyle out of it. And there are some dangerous people. We have to have places to put people who rape people, who murder people, who rob people with guns.

The issue is getting the balance right because what we have in prison is overwhelmingly people who come from deprived areas. If people are disadvantaged from birth, then I think that there is an obligation on all of us, as a society, including the media, including employers, including the churches to do something about it.

**Valerie Bresnihan:** I believe that people who do not commit crimes of violence and that suffer from extraordinary social deprivation should be treated outside of prison in the community.

# 3

## *Plenary Session*
## *Pointers to Effective Action*

# The Pathways Project

**Martin Walters**

In this short paper I will be explaining the Pathways Project and its achievements and then highlighting suggested developments and changes that are needed in pre and post-release. These suggested developments and changes are from a Pathways Perspective, although all the research and good practice in other European Countries support these points.

**The Pathways Project**

The Pathways Post-release Centre opened its doors in November 1996. It is presently funded by the EU Social Fund and promoted by the city of Dublin VEC.

*The main aim of the centre is to provide a social-educational guidance and support mechanism for ex-prisoners on release.*

The centre offers support, guidance and advice to ex-prisoners on matters concerning employment, training and educational courses, accommodation and social welfare. Thus enabling ex-prisoners to re-integrate back into mainstream society. Ex-prisoners are referred from Prison Education (pre-release courses), Probation and Welfare, Drug Rehabilitation Centres, local Community Groups and other ex-prisoners. Some prisoners also attend on a daily temporary release basis, mainly from the Training Unit in Mountjoy. This scheme is part of a Pre-release programme, organised in liaison with the Probation and Welfare Service and enables long-term prisoners to rehabilitate back into society. All participants attend on a voluntary basis.

In the process of preparation for referral, the Centre gives support in terms of personal development, gaining confidence and heightening self-esteem as well as personal and vocational guidance counselling. It also offers a wide range of classes / activities (e.g., Personal Development, Peer Support, Work Preparation, English / Literacy, Computing, Social Studies, Art, Drama, Photography, Cookery, Outdoor Pursuits). These classes / activities not only increase skill levels but also prepare participants for employment and training.

Each new participant is given an individual action plan and a programme to suit their particular needs, as well as signing a rights and responsibilities agreement. These individualised programmes are designed to give the participants a sense of purpose and a goal to aim for. This will in fact enable the Centre to achieve its main objective - the social and educational re-integration of ex-prisoners into society.

The Centre will be starting a CE Scheme in partnership with the Bridge Project next month and this will consist of a training programme with work experience. This Scheme will enable participants to prepare for employment within a structured programme.

**Achievements So Far**

The Centre has catered for 280 ex-prisoners since it opened two years ago. Most participants are on a pre-training programme of preparation for referral, although a minority of participants come only for specific advice and guidance. Participants have been referred onto:

| | |
|---|---|
| Employment | 17% |
| Training & Upskilling | 22% |
| Further Education | 7%. |

All participants are tracked and supported on referral and participants not attending regularly are contacted by telephone and / or letter. It should be noted that only 10 per cent of participants

have re-offended and this compares with a national recidivism rate of 75 per cent.

There are a number of ex-prisoners employed in the Centre as Community Support Workers. Their main duties are to support and advise other ex-prisoners in terms of advocacy and peer support. They have also initiated the *WISE-UP Programme*. This involves two Support Workers visiting schools and Youthreach Centres and talking about their life experiences in terms of crime, prison and drug addiction. They also point out to young people the mistakes they made and bring a sense of realism to issues of crime and punishment. The feedback from these organisations has been more than positive and it gives the workers an opportunity to contribute something to the community. Ex-prisoners are also employed as teachers (Art and Drama) and magazine editors and producers under a Community Employment Scheme. A magazine for prisoners and ex-prisoners will be produced for Christmas 1998.

The main reasons why the Centre has been successful in recruiting and referring participants are:

- they attend voluntarily;
- it is seen as independent of the Penal System;
- the support services and classes/activities it provides;
- the referral onto employment, training and education; and,
- the establishment of links with various agencies and organisations.

The Centre therefore provides a service to enable ex-prisoners to gain access to education, training and employment opportunities and help break the cycle of criminal behaviour and social deprivation.

**Changes and Developments from a Pathways Perspective**

**Plans for Support Mechanisms for Prisoners:** There needs to be extensive planning and support mechanisms for prisoners while

they are in prison and in particular prior to release. Sentence management / planning for all medium to long-term prisoners is essential and must be implemented in the short term and for every prisoner in the long term. The Department of Justice has promoted the idea of sentence management in their five year plan – *The Management of Offenders*:

> *Positive Sentence Management is directed towards making available to offenders a range of services and facilities aimed at helping them to cope with their sentences, to preserve their physical and mental well being and to prepare them, as far as practicable, for early structured release under supervision, if justified and earned.* (p. 40).

The Department also proposes to set up a Positive Sentence Management Committee in each prison. But the Department still has to implement this policy decision for all prisoners.

Though the Probation and Welfare Service and the Prison Service have started this process of sentence management, it is limited at present. There are in particular programmes for long-term prisoners and the De-tox programme in the Medical Care Unit.

Pre-release Courses organised by Prison Education perform an important function in preparing prisoners for release in terms of personal development, personal planning and coming to terms with their criminal conviction and in most cases their drug problem. But, unfortunately, these courses only cater for a small number of prisoners.

The Prison Service, the Probation and Welfare Service and Prison Education need to implement sentence planning, adequate support mechanisms (e.g., counselling, vocational guidance, N/A, AVP Programmes) and extensive Pre-release Courses in the short term for all medium and long-term prisoners, leading in the long term to all prisoners. This obviously means extra resources in terms of staff and materials.

**Plans for Support Mechanisms Post-Release:** Ex-prisoners should continue to be supported on release in terms of personal planning, personal development, vocational guidance, gaining of additional skills (educational and vocational), accommodation, drug addiction support and in their relations with family members. This holistic approach and advocacy programme will give them stability in their life and help break the cycle of criminality and drug addiction.

To enable this type of support to work effectively there needs to be co-ordination between all the different agencies involved (e.g., Probation and Welfare, Bridge Project, Pathways Centre, PACE, TARGET, Drug Rehabilitation Centres etc.). At present there is co-ordination and referral but there can also be duplication of services with agencies competing for the more motivated clientele. This co-ordination between agencies needs to be organised in a way that ensures that the client is dealt with holistically.

Post-release Centres for ex-prisoners, such as Pathways, have proven to be an effective model in re-integrating ex-prisoners back into society. Additional funding needs to be made available not only for Pathways to continue after 1999 but for similar Centres to be established in other parts of Dublin as well as Cork, Limerick and Galway.

**Accommodation:** Over the last two years, staff in Pathways have found that the issue of homelessness and accommodation is a major problem with ex-prisoners. This may be in the form of complete homelessness on release or an ex-prisoner wishing to move out of his area to make a fresh start, free from the pressures of his peers. The Eastern Health Board are willing to work with the Prison Authorities, Probation and Welfare and organisations like Pathways in making sure that a prisoner on release has a place to stay. They will also pay rent allowance in the last week of a persons sentence to secure a private rented flat on release.

The problem is that a large number of ex-prisoners do not wish to avail of the hostels in the city as they wish to escape the drug

culture that unfortunately pervades many hostels. There is Priorswood Hostel, run by PACE, but this can only cater for 14/15 clients. PACE are in fact planning to set up a hostel for women in the near future.

There is a definite need to establish half-way houses for ex-prisoners. This would not only give an ex-prisoner initial stability on release from prison but could also cater for other needs in terms of counselling, education and drug addiction support. Ex-prisoners after an appropriate period of time would then be referred onto more permanent accommodation (e.g., private rented accommodation, Dublin Corporation).

At present, there is a shortage of accommodation for single people offered by Dublin Corporation and it is becoming increasingly more difficult for ex-prisoners to obtain private rented accommodation due to the fact that many landlords are not prepared to accept the EHB rent allowance. The immediate answer is for the Corporation to build more units for single people, so that ex-prisoners wishing to bring stability to their lives and make a fresh start can do so. This stability with support from centres like Pathways is one of the most effective ways of lowering the rate of recidivism.

**Preparation for Referral – Employment, Training and Educational Courses:** The Pathways Centre's main aim is to prepare ex-prisoners for referral and the time spent in Pathways will depend on the particular individual's needs. In this process a holistic approach is adopted in terms of personal development, obtaining additional skills, counselling, vocational guidance, drug addiction support and if necessary contact with families.

Many participants attending Pathways have few educational qualifications, little work experience, and a history of drug abuse:

| | |
|---|---|
| No formal education | 45% |
| Junior / Inter. Cert. | 31% |
| Leaving Cert | 12% |
| Third Level | 12%. |

In fact many of these participants obtained their formal educational / qualifications whilst in prison. The support mechanisms and educational programmes in Pathways are therefore necessary in preparing participants for referral. The new Community Employment Scheme will also have a long-term benefit in preparing clients for employment.

In Pathways, there is a need to give support to clients coming to terms with their drug problem and the Centre can address this in terms of drug addiction support (drug addiction support worker), counselling (personal counsellor) and group work (peer support classes and personal development). If a client is still using drugs and chaotic in their behaviour, the Centre will tend to refer them onto a programme at the Merchant's Quay Centre. A significant number of our clients though are on a Methadone Programme and are stable enough to fully participate in our classes / activities.

Many participants have been referred onto FÁS and CERT training programmes and educational courses at VEC Colleges and third level institutions. There have been no problems with these institutions accepting ex-prisoners. The Centre informs the institution concerned about the participant's background and ensures that confidentiality remains with the supervisor or course organiser. The Centre will continue to support the participant and will deal with any problems that arise. Many participants attending training programmes and courses will use the Centre in the evening.

The position with employers is more complicated. Many ex-prisoners have problems obtaining employment, even if they have the appropriate skills. If an ex-prisoner tells the employer the truth about his/her background, they often do not obtain the job. If they give false information and are found out at a later date, the employer often terminates their employment. To overcome these problems, the Centre has been approaching employers and persuading them to give employment to ex-prisoners. The Centre will only recommend ex-prisoners who are ready for employment and who have the appropriate skills. It will also support the ex-prisoner whilst in employment and deal with any problems that

arise. The employer can also contact the Centre with any queries / problems they might have with the participant concerned. The issue of confidentiality is at all times maintained with the supervisor / personnel officer. In this process the Centre has been assisted by the organisation Connect (Enterprise Network).

In times of economic growth and job vacancies at an all time high, it is important to seize the time and negotiate with employers in the employment of ex-prisoners. Additional staffing for all organisations dealing with ex-prisoners is needed so that this important process is performed at the most effective level.

**Contacting and Working with Families:** In the process of pre and post release, contacting and working with families is often necessary. In Pathways contact is only made with a family member(s) with permission of the participant concerned.

The contact with families can be for many different reasons, but it is usually to assist the participant in terms of personal support, drug addiction support, personal development, preparation for referral and coming to terms with their criminal behaviour. On occasions it is also necessary to build bridges between the client and his/her parents (e.g., to enable the client to obtain accommodation in the family home as he/she is completely homeless and hostel accommodation is unsuitable). This holistic approach gives the client more stability in their life and often breaks down barriers between the client and his/her family.

Spouses, partners, parents, children of participants can also avail of the classes / activities in the Centre. This approach integrates the participant more fully into the Centre and gives additional support to the family member concerned.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, there needs to be a definite programme of sentence management introduced and implemented by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and extensive support mechanisms, pre and post release, put in place. This would

include Post-release Centres being set up on the Pathways model throughout the country, working in conjunction with similar projects organised by the Probation and Welfare Service.

Legislation needs to be enacted whereby an ex-prisoner's record is eradicated after a set number of years depending on the offence committed. This would make it easier for ex-prisoners to obtain employment and training.

Paul O'Mahony found in his study of prisoners in Mountjoy Prison that 57 per cent had no educational qualifications and 79 per cent were unemployed prior to imprisonment. There is also a 75 per cent recidivism rate in the country and to break this cycle of criminality there is a need for more education, training, guidance and support inside prison as well as a continuation of this process on release.

If these processes and programmes were implemented, it is fair to say that ex-prisoners would have a better opportunity to obtain full-time employment and bring more stability into their lives.

# The Outreach Project

## Colm O'Herlihy

What I'm going to do is to speak very briefly on the Integra Outreach Project, what informed the project, what the project is or was, what we learned from it, and where it is now.

Let me begin by saying that the Integra Outreach project evolved out of the work of the Cork Prison Education Unit. The Unit has been involved in post-release education for almost 15 years. In the mid 1980s we had a situation where Cork, Arbour Hill and Loughan House Education Units were partially given over to cell accommodation. At that time, we in Cork decided to re-deploy some of our teachers to a post-release project. That project ran for a number of years. Then, in 1994, when we made an application to Integra with the DEIS Centre of the Cork Institute of Technology (CIT), the application was informed by our experiences over the previous years.

The aim of Integra Outreach was to create a climate in the community whereby an infrastructure to facilitate the reintegration of offenders would be established. There were a number of principles. It would be participant driven. It would be community led – which meant it would be a multi-agency approach. We would seek to complement rather than duplicate. These were the principles that we went into this project with.

Anyone familiar with prisons will know that the most popular use of prisoner time is expended in the areas of education and work training. And under that heading, the most popular form of time use is in the area of physical education, physical training, gym-work, aerobics, etc. So we determined to construct accessible, accredited, flexible programmes with health as their central plank.

Given the constraints of time and resources - just two years for the project - we decided to, as I said, not to duplicate what was already going on. We took this view because it is not a good idea to compete with under-funded voluntary and community organisations, self-help groups, literacy schemes and so forth. Our view or aim was to complement, to identify gaps and, where necessary, to try and fill them. So to this end, myself and another member of the management committee visited a large number of workshops, literacy schemes, crèches, youth schemes, self-help groups and so forth, around the north side of the city. In return for our expertise and resources, we asked them for participation by our participants up to a maximum of 30 per cent of their enrolment. And as it turned out, five of them bought into this project. So that was the project, basically.

**What did we learn from the Outreach project?**

We learned, number one, that you must have local involvement and the more local involvement you have the better. I learned anyway, that reintegration is in the gift of local groups. It is in the gift of community groups and it is not in the gift of institutions and politicians. People who live in these communities must welcome back their errant, if you want to call it that, sons and daughters.

The second thing we learned was the importance of small numbers and setting achievable targets to be met over comparatively short periods of time. Also, these targets must be defined by participants themselves.

Number three, it shouldn't cost anybody anything to participate. All expenses relating to childcare, transport, lunches, crèches, were paid by the project.

Fourth, there must be an great emphasis on process - on the process of transition from prison to household and from household into the more structured education and training centres.

**What gaps did we identify?**

We identified a gap in the accreditation area. The lowest form of accreditation, the lowest rung of the accreditation ladder in health related fitness was at NCVA (National Council for Vocational Awards) Level 2 . A lot of our people were not able to make that. So we lowered the rung to Foundation Level and Level 1. As a result the project was responsible in a large measure for the writing of NCVA modules in health rated fitness at Foundation Level and Level 1 and the production of tutor resource packs to deliver these modules.

We also noticed that there was a gap in the sense that you cannot run health related fitness courses if you don't have a gym, and an accessible gym, at that. That means an affordable gym. So, in co-operation with Northside Community Enterprises in Blackpool in Cork and CIT, we bankrolled a gym basically to the tune of £25,000 for equipment. It is now managed by a past participant from Outreach. It costs £2 a week and it is used by everyone in the area.

Outreach finished in March of this year. That is, the funding from Integra stopped in March. However, the project it is now funded through the local drugs task force, FÁS, City Partnership Urban Limited, City of Cork Vocational Education Committee.

**What did Outreach achieve?**

The main thing I think we achieved is that we put the needs of the ex-offender on the agenda. I think we moved it up some agendas and it put it on other agendas. I think that we will continue to make progress slowly.

# The MABiS Project

**Wolfgang Wirth**

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this conference. My name is Wolfgang Wirth. I am the director of the Criminological Research Service of the Ministry of the Interior and Justice of North Rhine Westphalia – that is one of the 16 German states or Länder, and I am, amongst other things, responsible for the implementation, co-ordination, and evaluation of an INTEGRA project called *MABiS*.

*MABiS* is the acronym for a project title that could be translated as *Model Project - Integration of Training and Employment for Ex-Prisoners*. Being co-funded by INTEGRA, *MABiS* is the German part of a transnational partnership that aims at developing and comparing different employment-placement strategies for offenders. This partnership is called *PLANET* - Placement Network for Ex-Prisoners and includes:

- a project called *LIVE AND LEARN* which is run by the Finnish Probation and Aftercare Association in Tampere;
- the *WORK OUT NORTH* project of the West Yorkshire Probation Committee in Wakefield, United Kingdom; and,
- *POLARIS* – a project carried out by the Italian Ministry of Justice in Rome.

MABiS itself is run by the Ministry of the Interior and Justice of North Rhine-Westphalia in co-operation with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Urban Development, Cultural Affairs and Sports. The Justice Department is responsible for 36 prisons with a total of about 17,500 prisoners. Among these there are

about 1,300 prisoners in five prisons for young offenders – and that is the target group of our *MABiS* project.

Being part of the prison system, but going beyond its formal responsibilities, *MABiS* aims at developing a state-wide placement network for these young prisoners, especially for those who have been participants in vocational training programmes. It tries to provide the missing link between vocational training in prisons and post-sentence employment on the basis of three concrete objectives.

The first - and most general - objective is the improvement of information-exchange and networking among prisons and all external actors who may further prisoners' vocational re-integration.

The second - and most practical - objective is to ease young prisoners' access to the labour market while they are serving their sentence.

Our third - and most experimental objective - is to offer a limited number of vocational training places within the prison system to ex-prisoners who started a vocational training during imprisonment, but could not complete it due to an early conditional release.

In a most general sense one could say that *MABiS* aims at increasing the effectiveness of vocational training programmes for ex-prisoners. The results of an evaluation study we did some years ago show why we think this is necessary. A main conclusion of that evaluation was that while vocational training in prisons is necessary to improve most prisoners' poor vocational qualifications, it is not sufficient to reduce their recidivism rates. In fact, vocational training programmes for young prisoners in North Rhine Westphalia do improve participants' vocational skills effectively and, at a first glance, recidivism rates - measured in terms of return to prison - decrease with increasing levels of vocational qualifications.

But unfortunately, this is only half of the truth. Analysing our findings a little bit more carefully, we found that training participants who passed their exams successfully during imprisonment, but stayed unemployed afterwards showed an extremely high recidivism rate of 80 per cent! This is quite close to the recidivism rate of 90 per cent among unemployed training drop-outs. But compared to this there is a recidivism rate of only 32 per cent among successfully trained ex-prisoners who found an adequate job or follow-up training after having served their sentence.

Hence, post sentence employment is the key factor, although we should not forget that the prospects of getting a job increase with the quality of vocational skills and certificates achieved. In other words, it is extremely unlikely for untrained ex-prisoners to find a job, but it is very likely for unemployed ex-prisoners to relapse into crime - even if they completed vocational training schemes in prison. Consequently, vocational training and employment programmes for offenders have to be linked and, with regard to prisoners, they must begin in prisons and continue with the prisoner when released. However, since prisons in North Rhine Westphalia provide vocational training places for more than 40 per cent of all young prisoners, but cannot create real jobs for ex-prisoners, it became quite clear that adding some innovative placement services to traditional release preparations was the only way to ensure the required continuity. That is why *MABiS* was born.

So, what is needed to establish effective placement networks for ex-prisoners and how does *MABiS* try to manage the problems involved? Due to limits of time I would like to focus on just one central aspect that is - in my opinion - the basis of most problems we are confronted with. I have called it "the information gap" that must be bridged with regard to at least three different dimensions.

The first dimension concerns the lack of information employers have about the quality of skills prisoners can achieve during imprisonment. We assume that employers, being confronted with ex-prisoners, usually tend to over-estimate their risks and

problems, but under-estimate their potential value for the firm. A survey we did last year showed, that even among those employers who could imagine recruiting ex-prisoners, less than 10 per cent felt well enough informed about prisons' vocational training profiles. The result must necessarily be a relatively poor knowledge about ex-prisoners' vocational competencies and certificates. Our strategy to bridge this information gap is twofold.

On the one hand, representatives of employers' associations, trade unions, labour administration and job centres, training institutions and employment projects working in the catchment area of the five prisons involved are being invited to participate in regularly held information-exchange meetings. We hope that this will increase the public awareness of vocational training efforts in prisons and help prison staff to identify skill gaps in local labour markets. This may - in the long run - improve the structural basis for vocational integration programmes in prisons that take changing labour market requirements appropriately into account. But, of course, it cannot help a sufficiently large number of actual prisoners find appropriate jobs in the short run. Effective placement must therefore - on the other hand - be based on detailed information on individual clients that can be used in selective placement encounters with individual employers.

According to what Andrews and others have called the risk principle, the need principle and the responsivity principle, placement programmes require both a careful assessment of individual needs and risks and a systematic assessment of offenders' competencies and preferences. In other words, looking at individual deficits of clients is necessary, but it would be insufficient or even counterproductive, if one did not take their individual potentials concerning post-sentence employment into account. *MABiS* is therefore not only relying on data from prison files, which usually focus on the risks and deficits of offenders and are gathered during intake examinations to programme treatment during imprisonment. We are – in addition - gathering data at the end of imprisonment to structure individual pathways into the labour market and society. These include first of all

information on prisoners' school qualifications, vocational skills and wishes that are needed to make promising job applications. But - with the explicit consent of the offenders - we are also gathering and using information on their individual development during imprisonment and on additional problems like drug addiction, potential homelessness, financial problems and so on in order to avoid hopeless applications and to help them access aftercare services that may be needed to maintain post sentence-employment - if there is any at all.

Having said this, we are directly facing the second "information gap". This concerns our poor knowledge about the availability and accessibility of jobs or follow-up training posts that are appropriate to prisoners' individual needs and matched with their individual skills. Placing ex-prisoners into real jobs is of course the core objective of *MABiS*. But, for many reasons, the first labour market is usually not the first address for our target group.

There is a persistent need for specific employment projects for ex-prisoners - that is, by the way, one of the reasons why they have been defined as beneficiaries of the INTEGRA strand. However, there are still very few projects working exclusively with ex-prisoners, but - at least in Germany - a growing number of publicly co-funded projects providing training and employment opportunities for various other marginalised groups. These projects are not explicitly targeted at ex-prisoners, but can nevertheless be used by them.

Prison staff providing pre-release assistance are usually not sufficiently informed on these external projects. They may know about local projects in their own community, but this is by far not enough since prisoners' home addresses - that's where they want to find a job – are frequently quite far away from the place, where the prison is located. We therefore started a state-wide inventory on training and employment offers for ex-prisoners by sending out questionnaires to more than 800 of such organisations. We asked them to describe their projects and to tell us if, and under what conditions, ex-prisoners could participate. Up to now, we have received positive feed-back from 280 different organisations in

North Rhine Westphalia providing a total of 20,000 trainee posts in short-term vocational training courses, 10,000 places in regular apprenticeships, 8,500 places in employment schemes and about 5,600 real jobs.

We have got detailed information on the place and type of these projects, on intake requirements, and on the additional services offered by the organisations to help participants cope with their multiple problems. This information is now compiled in an electronic database and our *MABiS* staff - one team member in each of the five prisons for juvenile offenders plus one central co-ordinator - are using it to look for vacancies that are appropriate for *MABiS* participants. We are continuously up-dating this electronic database. This includes modifying old entries based on the experiences of individual placement efforts, but also adding new addresses from other sources like print media or internet job search, from co-operation with local job centres, probation officers, and from other participants of the information–exchange meetings I have already mentioned. Our database is therefore steadily growing and is now including more and more interested employers from the first labour market as well. So, we hope that placement prospects of *MABiS* participants will - like in a snowball system - get better and better during the coming months.

Relying on our previous research findings and on research done by Mark W. Lipsey, we are convinced that helping prisoners to improve their employability and to obtain jobs, in particular during the high risk period immediately after their release, is - as a generality - the most promising approach to reduce their recidivism rates. But we still don't know enough about what works best for what type of offenders, under which conditions and why - or why not for others. That brings me to conclude with a final remark on the third information gap. That is, our insufficient knowledge concerning the differential effects of training, placement and employment for different offenders in differently structured labour markets.

*MABiS* is trying to bridge this gap, too. It is not only designed to be a practical placement and networking project, it is also a

scientific research project that includes several levels of analysis: a qualitative implementation analysis, a quantitative beneficiaries monitoring, and an empirical recidivism study. Our research design is quite ambitious and it is not possible to explain its complexity in a presentation like this. Anyhow, you can be sure that we will publish our results - and perhaps we will find an opportunity to discuss them in the near future.

# The JUVOS Project

**Andrea Ward**

My name is Andrea Ward and I am Projects Manager at Tyneside Training and Enterprise Council. I work with partner agencies to develop strategies for excluded groups. In relation to developing strategies for offenders, Nottingham Probation Service and Tyneside Training and Enterprise Council have worked together for a number of years now initiating education, training and employment projects within the Probation Service. We have had success with a European Social Fund Objective Three Programme and have developed a Horizon Initiative to deliver accreditation through Community Service Programmes. We realised the need to bring together these two projects in a structured format. Also, the Probation Service was involved in running projects that provided outdoor activities, mentoring, and personal supports to offenders.

If you look at these projects as stand alone projects, they seem to have little or even no connection. However, if you break down the projects into elements in respect of guidance, personal development and accreditation, we saw that all the projects could be linked together. Also, we thought there was a need for a focal point that would bring the elements together to give a structure in which the offender could develop and benefit both personally and educationally with the aim of progressing into full-time training or employment and, as a consequence of this, reducing offending behaviour. This led to us developing the *JUVOS* project.

**JUVOS: Its Aims and Objectives**

The overall aim of *JUVOS* is to develop, pilot and promote innovative multi-dimensional approaches regarding the training,

support and social rehabilitation of offenders, to improve their labour market integration and reduce the re-offending rate among offenders registered with Northumbria Probation Service. The client group is offenders within the community on probation and those who have just left prison and are registered with the Probation Service. It targets over 2000 individuals during two and a half years and covers the area of Tyne and Wear.

The project's objectives are to:

- provide training and support for ex-offenders to enhance their social rehabilitation, improve their labour market integration and reduce levels of re-offending;
- supply vocational guidance and assessment to ex-offenders on probation orders or community service with Northumbria Probation Service;
- to assist Probation Service Staff to become trainers by giving vocational trainer / assessor qualifications;
- deliver basic skills, personal development and vocational skills training to offenders;
- provide self-employment support programmes to offenders to facilitate progression into self-employment; and,
- disseminate information, particularly that of best practice between all partners in order to reduce re-offending.

How do we actually put that into practice? The practice combines various elements. Guidance and support: one-to-one guidance and group sessions for the offender to improve all aspects of their job search. Education: offenders are given the opportunity to improve their basic word and number power, crucial elements when trying to access employment. NVQ Accreditation: this is a national vocational qualification that is a standard and recognised in England. It is the opportunity for offenders to work towards formal qualifications whilst on community service or probation orders with Northumbria Probation Service. Work Experience: this is provided by local companies co-ordinated through the Employment Development Officer. Outdoor Activities: these focus on personal development. Self-Employment Programmes: help and advice is provided to offenders interested in setting up

their own business by the Prince's Youth Business Trust. Finally, mentor support: this is provided to ensure a greater retention rate.

How does that programme actually look in practice? The key agency is Northumbria Probation Service. Offenders are identified by the Probation Officer. The Probation Officer identifies people whom he feels are ready to access employment and training opportunities. They are given vocational guidance and are assessed initially by a Guidance Officer that is appointed to them as a key worker. Then they have a mentor appointed to them, again as a key worker. The idea is that they will have personal support as well as vocational and educational support.

The individual has an action plan based on the guidance interview that provides the link into the other services that are provided, the skills unit, multi-skills, key skills, vocational skills, communication skills and others. Then there are employment led programmes providing customised routes to sectors of employment such as the health sector, catering, hospitality and others. The aim of these programmes is to get the individuals to actually think about the kind of vocational areas they would like to go into. Offenders often have very stereotyped ideas of vocational areas. To breakdown these we invite employers in to give talks about particular jobs so that offenders can get a true picture of what it is like to work in these. The Access, Start-Up and Support, and Self-Employment Programmes are run because some offenders, due to the offence that they have committed, will never be able to access the world of employment, so self-employment is an ideal opportunity to progress. There is also the Outdoor Challenge programme incorporating activities like survival skills and the arts.

When an individual has sampled different parts of the programme, they will go back to their Guidance Officer, or talk to the Probation Officer, or their mentor and discuss which way they would like to go. There is no strict timetable of how long they should be on the programme. We advise that six weeks is a minimum amount of time. However, an individual can step into and out of the programme over time but we hope, by the end of it,

that the outcome will be that they move on to some form of training or education or into employment.

**Some Lessons**

There are some interesting lessons emerging from what we have done so far. For example, we looked at how we worked with employers and, as mentioned by other speakers, we found that the best approach is based on selling the project as a service that is beneficial to them and not just to the offenders. Also in working with employers we have found that we need to look out to find work placements that give individuals a real feel for the working environment and the working culture of the workplace. We also need to give support to individuals once they've entered into employment. For example, by providing a mediator between the manager and client where necessary or just a support mechanism whereby the client can talk to their mentor to discuss different problems that may be arising.

With regard to re-offending, the majority of the offenders in our target group are unemployed and it is generally acknowledged that unemployment is the major factor in re-offending. No money, no job and no prospects lead to offending and re-offending. It is, therefore, crucial that the *JUVOS* project intervenes to stop re-offending, not only by developing offenders' skills and qualifications and motivation, but by providing the opportunity to get a job.

Individuals may go through the *JUVOS* process but that does not automatically mean that they are ready to enter employment. They may not be job ready, or able to develop a fixed routine, or to take instructions. If these issues are not addressed before an offender takes up employment they often lead to frictions on the job and eventually lead to dismissal, and the cycle begins once again. In trying to tackle this we feel it is crucial that the Probation Officer, when identifying individuals, has to make sure that the client is ready, or in a position, to participate in the training and employment. There must be definite lines of

communication between the Probation Officer, the client and the Vocational Guidance Officer.

**Achievements and Issues**

We feel that the achievements of the offenders are the most crucial part of the programme. A selection of these is shown in Box 1. These illustrate that the *JUVOS* process is capable of enabling participants to make real progress. At the moment we are looking at this more systematically in our project evaluation.

**Box 1**

*I was just pleased to be given a chance. Now I am back into work I will definitely not offend again.*
Ex-offender working with Newcastle City Health Trust.

*I was asked if I wanted to do an NVQ and mechanics is something I've always been interested in. I already had mechanical skills, but nothing down on paper, so I thought I may as well do something useful with my time and get an NVQ in it. At the end of the day I had something to show for it, rather than a few quid in my pocket, or a hangover the next day. I am sure it would come in handy if I went for a job as a mechanic, or even as a tyre-fitter... Apart from a CSE in maths, and my City & Guilds in Communications this is my first qualification. Having got a full NVQ in motor mechanics, I feel more confident about myself and my skills.*
Ex-offender with an NVQ in Public Vehicle Motor Mechanics.

*I have learnt to work as a team member, how to cook to high standards and new skills in hygiene. I am now able to get on with people in charge. I order and maintain stock and have become more responsible for my own actions.*
Paul Carney, Chef, Newcastle Travel Inn.

*I had been out of work for a long time because of my problem. Now I am working I feel that I can give more to the job and I am pleased to be trusted.*
Ex-offender working with Newcastle City Health Trust.



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It is also worthwhile to look at some comments from employers that have been involved in the project. These are shown in Box 2. There are some major employers on this list: Newcastle City Health Trust, Marks and Spencer, and Newcastle City Travel Inn. Now you can see by that, *JUVOS* has made these organisations very aware of the problems that offenders have when accessing employment and also made them look at their organisation's attitudes towards offenders and the employment of offenders.

**Box 2**

*We have been working in partnership with the Probation Service for just over a year, during which time we have had eleven people on work placements, nine of who are now in paid employment. I have been impressed by the commitment of the trainees. They have all been eager to get back into mainstream employment and prove themselves. As employers, this commitment makes it easier for us to recommend trainees when they apply for jobs.*
Wendy Stacey, Senior Human Resources Manager, Newcastle City Health NHS Trust.

*Marks and Spencer, Newcastle, have co-operated with Northumbria Probation Service since October 1997. Four candidates applied for Temporary Seasonal Sales Assistant vacancies and following an interview three were successful. During their paid employment all three were hardworking and they strived to achieve good levels of competence in all areas of their work. We would have no hesitation in re-employing them within the store should a suitable vacancy arise, or recommend them for positions of a similar nature.*
Pauline Bill, Training and Recruitment Supervisor, Marks and Spencer.

*Paul is a very good worker and a reliable member of staff who is learning to work under his own initiative. We consider him a valuable member of the team and hope to see him progress even further. For us this has been an excellent learning experience.*
Yvonne Bruce, Deputy Duty Manager, Newcastle City Travel Inn, referring to Paul Carney, employed as a chef.

However, one thing we have learned is that though we seem to have got the key people in the organisations involved, we have found that when these individuals leave, it isn't always easy to work with that organisation again or in the same way again. So therefore what we need to do is to address the following questions: is it key members in the organisation that are giving us access and providing employment and job opportunities or is it the organisation? Has the organisation actually gone through a culture change? I think that these questions need to be addressed if we are to really assess what progress we are making with employers and how sustainable this progress is.

# What Works and Why

**Andrew McCall**
**European Offender Employment Forum (EOEF)**

I would like to say, first of all, that I am particularly pleased that this conference is being organised as part of the Integra programme. It has been a concern of the Forum that we have a large number of projects throughout Europe running under the Integra programme and yet it is quite difficult to get some kind of mechanism for comparing what is being done in different countries. So this event is useful and I hope that it is the first of many in other countries.

I have been asked to speak on the issue of what works and why. Well, the EOEF has been trying to find out exactly that over the last half a dozen years or so, through conferences, research, and the other work of our group. I think there are some very clear themes emerging and, of course, these will echo what people have already said here this morning.

I think the first thing to say is the need for flexible programmes. We have heard it this morning, the need to begin from the point of the needs of the offender - the skills, the needs, the aspirations of the offender - not from the needs of the programme setters. I think that has become pretty clear from our work. If you are able to tailor-make programmes to meet the range of needs then that is something we certainly need to be doing. And that then means effective and thorough assessment of needs. That has been the foundation of virtually all the programmes we have been looking at. We heard it from Martin Hickey earlier this morning and in a couple of the projects that we have just heard information on. There is actually a project in Europe, it is called the *Entrance*

*Programme*, run under another European programme - Leonardo Da Vinci - which is developing an assessment model. It has identified 42 sub areas for assessment and it is proving very effective and I hope we are going to have some results soon.

The second thing is integrated approaches. Again, we have heard a lot about that already today. It is clear, it seems to me, that multi-dimensional problems need multi-dimensional solutions. We heard Jason Bollard from *Pathways* this morning talking about the difficulties of finding housing. We have heard it also from Martin Walters in his presentation. Also, a high proportion of offenders have a drug or alcohol problem. We heard some statistics just now. In parts of Europe drug related offenders account for 60 to 70 per cent of those in prison. So it is not just enough, and it cannot be just enough, to look at training and employment needs in isolation from these other issues.

In the EOEF we have been examining quite a number of practical examples of integrated or holistic programmes. Some of these are described in the material that has been circulated. I find it encouraging that increasingly it is being recognised that there has to be very strong links between agencies in order to deliver these integrated programmes.

The third area is relevance to the labour market. It seems pretty clear that there is a need to make sure that the skill development, the work, and the training that is undertaken in prison are all relevant to jobs in the labour market. It makes absolute sense but you would be surprised how little of that you actually see when you are investigating and looking at what is happening on the ground in many prisons. This was underlined by Wolfgang Wirth when he pointed to the damaging effects on offenders resulting from training that does not lead to jobs – they have higher recidivism rates than those not receiving training. So good labour market intelligence, good information, ensuring the link-up between what goes on in training and employment in prisons and the jobs that are available outside is really a common feature of many of the projects that are working well.

Allied to that, the next thing is about links with employers. We are seeing, increasingly, that the really successful projects, particularly in terms of securing jobs for offenders, are those with pro-active links with employers, those who are going out and forging links while the prisoners are still in prison. There are plenty of examples. There is a programme called the *Inside-Out Programme* in Holland, where the employers are actually involved in the training of the prisoners while they are still in prison and the prisoners go out during their sentence. This leads to employers taking them on after their sentence. So pro-active links with employers are an important part of what works.

The next thing is partnership. And really that is implicit in much of what I have just said. Co-operation between the various agencies, between prison and probation services for example, and also co-operation with labour ministries and the agencies that they are asking to deliver basic and vocational skills training. The point here is that it is much better if we can begin the assessment, training, and job search process while people are completing their sentence. That means co-operation as a matter of routine between the key agencies at national, regional and local level. And it also means recognising that crime and offending is not the problem of one sector of service providers. A satisfactory solution will only come through working together.

Now, just a very quick run through some of the things we have learned and some pointers as to what we should be doing. Before that we should remember what was said by John Lonergan, the Governor of Mountjoy Prison. That is, the number of prisoners benefiting from labour market friendly, integrated, multi-dimensional projects is very low in number, very low in number indeed. So, then, for me, the challenge now is how to broaden effective working for the benefit of larger numbers of offenders. I think this is the real challenge.

For me, the first thing is that you have to set basic standards and mechanisms for controlling the services that are delivered to offenders, whether in prison or in the community. So we have to be sure that certain minimum standards for skills training and

employment are set, are applied across the board, and are measured according to pre-set criteria. It may sound obvious but it is not happening to any great extent. Basically, what we are talking about is an active management and quality control system. It does not mean running all programmes in Ireland from the Prison Service Headquarters, but it does mean that standards are set nationally and responsibility for measuring results lies nationally so that lessons can be learned from the operation of programmes and improvements can be made across the board. In England and Wales now, they are just beginning in the prison service to tackle the problems of basic skills amongst prisoners. Sixty per cent of people entering prison lack basic educational skills. So what they have done is establish an overall target for raising basic skills standards. They have set a number of standards which should be met and include a spending review which is attached to those projects receiving funding - they only get the money if they actually deliver the work. And it seems to me that that process of standard-setting, quality control, is key if we are going to generalise this and not leave good projects as small local examples of good practice.

So I'm saying we need an active interventionist role here. I think it is what Olivia O'Leary, this morning, called a hands-on approach. It is no good leaving the setting of standards up to local projects of prisoners. They must have the room to interpret the standards and the flexibility to deliver them as local circumstances dictate. But we have to try and improve on the current situation where the level and quality of education, training or employment help received by offenders varies so widely according to where they live and whether there is a project in their area.

I think the next thing coming on from that is policy co-ordination. We have to get away from the idea that crime and recidivism are the preserve of one government or agency and that a solution can be found without cross-reference to other agencies and departments. The situation is exacerbated by the arrangements for delivering services to offenders. In most countries the responsibilities are shared between a range of different agencies, prison services, probation services, labour ministries, NGOs,

education departments, universities, health agencies for drug and alcohol addicts, and the list goes on and on. So as a matter of routine we need policy making, we need the shaping of programmes and the strategic direction for services to re-integrate offenders to be determined through proper co-ordination between government departments.

Now what does that mean? Well it means, for example, that labour ministries and justice ministries need to communicate, to ensure that training programmes are available to offenders and are appropriate to their needs. We need also to ensure that appropriate guidance and training is available to offenders at the end of their sentences. And we need to ensure that offenders understand the welfare benefits to which they are entitled. There are examples of this being done in Holland and also in the UK. But it is something, I think, we need to see increased.

A final point, if I may, about the political profile of this issue, because a lot of people have talked about funds and I think the key really is raising the profile of the issue, both at national and at European level. The European Offender Employment Forum has done some work and tried, if you like, to keep the torch flying in Brussels and Strasbourg. But we need to do more of it, and we need to work in our own countries to raise the profile. We have to remember when we are talking about Europe that it is not some kind of separate entity. I mean the money that everyone here is getting from Europe comes from us in the first place. It is not a separate body. And when you are looking at the decision making process in Europe, people talk about lobbying the Parliament and lobbying the Commission. That is important. But the most important people to lobby are your own governments because the Council of Ministers, which comprises National government ministers, is the body with the most power in the European decision making structure. So, if we are looking to get more funds, better regulations associated with offender programmes, then we have got to address the political profile and awareness of offender programmes in our own countries.

So, to sum up, there is much we know about good practice and about what works. But if we're going to make real progress, affecting larger numbers of offenders, we have to work on another level. We need active management, quality control, and co-ordination of services. We have to be strategic and systematic and, above all, we have to get the issue higher up the political agenda.

# 4

# *Workshops*

## Workshop 1

## Education and Training for Prisoners and Ex-Offenders

The purpose of this workshop was to gain an insight into the nature and role of education and training provision for prisoners and ex-offenders and to identify directions for developing provision in this area.

The workshop was facilitated by Katherina Doherty of the European Social Fund Programme Evaluation Unit in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. To stimulate discussion on the topic there were inputs by Paula Lawlor and Liam Mahon of the *Connect Project*, by Dr. Hilde Van de Boogart of the *Work and Qualification Project* (Germany), by Dermot Fitzpatrick an ex-offender and *Pathways* participant, and Camilla McGourty, a representative of the Irish Prison Education Council.

The *Connect Project* is an action research based project which is a collaborative undertaking by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the National Training and Development Institute (NTDI). The aim of the project is to provide a comprehensive examination of existing and developing service provision in the areas of work and training for prisoners in Mountjoy Prison and the Training Unit. Based on the research the project will develop and seek to implement, on a pilot basis, strategies and systems to fill any gaps discovered. It has the task of establishing clear and effective linkages between the situation in custody, the training and educational opportunities available to prisoners, and progression to further work, training or education in the wider community.

The *Work and Qualification Project* is promoted by the Department of Justice (Justizdehbehorde) Hamburg. It is being implemented in the women's prison on the island of Hahnofersand near the city of Hamburg. The aim of the project is to enable women while in custody to have a chance to get a qualification that will enable them to integrate into the labour market either while they are on parole or when they leave prison. The qualifications are tailored to the needs of the labour market and enable individual pathways to be developed based on the skills and capacities of the clients.

Dermot Fitzpatrick is employed with the Pathways Project. He is a former drug addict who has been in and out of a number prisons over an 18 year period. He currently visits schools and Youthreach Centres as part of the *Wise-Up Programme* informing children about his life experiences regarding drugs and crime. Dermot provided insights into his personal perspectives on being in prison.

The Prison Education Service was established in 1968. There are 15 Educational Units in prisons throughout the state (6 are located in Dublin). The aim of the service is to provide a high quality, broadly based educational system to help prisoners cope with their sentence and to assist prisoners in achieving personal development and prepare for life after release. The Prison Education Service in Ireland is funded primarily by the Department of Education and Science through the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and is co-ordinated by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Participants in the workshop represented a broad range of statutory and voluntary organisations with responsibility for education and training provision including the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Probation and Welfare Service, the Prison Education Service, Prison Officers, the Penal Reform Trust, national and transnational projects concerned with prisoners and ex-offenders, and representatives of community and voluntary organisations working with offenders and ex-offenders.

The discussion during the workshop highlighted three main issues. These were:

- the relevance of education/training and work provision within prison;
- the lack of supports and guidance for prisoners and ex-offenders; and,
- the lack of co-ordination of services.

**Relevance of Education/Training and Work Provision within Prison**

Participation in education, training or work within prison is based on the voluntary participation of the prisoner. The majority of workshop participants considered that education and training in prisons provided no incentives for prisoners to acquire qualifications or take up the work provided in prison, as the qualifications and work was seen as being inappropriate to the needs of the prisoners and the labour market. The case of Mountjoy Prison was particularly highlighted.

It was considered vitally important that the education, training and work provided within prisons should improve the employability of the prisoners when they get out, thus ensuring that they "get a good wage". The example of Wheatfield prison was cited as a good example, where prisoners have an opportunity to learn a trade (bricklaying) ensuring that when they leave prison they are not going into the same environment and have a skill that can provide "meaningful work" and better prospects.

The consensus of opinion was that a large part of the task of rehabilitating a prisoner is increasing employability through quality training and education. Prisoners want marketable skills that can facilitate their employment on release. Vocational training programmes should equip prisoners with skills that they need in order to compete favourably in the labour market once released.

Vocational training alone is not the complete answer to the rehabilitation of offenders - academic, educational, attitudinal development and post release support services are also required.

**Lack of Supports and Guidance**

There was general agreement that when prisoners leave prison there are no supports available to assist them to integrate back into the community and re-integrate into the labour market. This was summed up as - *You get out with a fiver and a black bag.*

The lack of support and information / advice on options for further training or employment available on release, coupled with the fact that prisoners are going back into the same environment, invariably leads to recidivism.

*There is no follow-up, prisoners have to find out for themselves about projects such as Merchants Quay and Pathways.*

The *Connect Project* is concerned with offering information and choice to prisoners on release. Based on the research carried out the project seeks to develop a "problem solving, client centred approach" based on pro-active mediation type interventions. An individualised approach ensures that the needs of the client group are met and linked to re-integration to the labour market and the community.

The individualised approach being developed by the *Connect Project* has highlighted that most prisoners have a limited idea of job and occupational possibilities open to them. Therefore, there is a need to consider a wide range of educational and occupational options. There has, to date, been a failure to provide enough services and information on external job placement.

In the case of the *Work and Qualification Project*, there are 46 female prisoners involved in a closed unit. It is compulsory for Prisoners to work and learn. Prisoners qualifications and work are tailored to the needs of the participants and for different labour market segments. The *Work and Qualification Project* provides

qualifications and experience in language, social abilities and field knowledge. These include occupational therapy, German as a foreign language, communications and new technologies, horticulture, storeroom and housework.

**Lack of Co-ordination of Services**

Most participants considered that there was a lack of co-ordination of activities between services internally within the prison system (training, education, probation and welfare) and a lack of linkages externally with organisations in the community (mainstream education and training providers, employers and community groups).

Training and education services operate under different structures and there are no mechanisms to support contact between supervisors (in prison) and external training agencies, employers or community based organisations that provide support for former prisoners.

The CTEC (Custody - Training - Education - Community) was cited as being an initiative which aims to develop greater linkages from training and education in custody to labour market opportunities in the community. The CTEC Initiative is currently being developed by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in Mountjoy Prison and the Training Unit. It is proposed under CTEC to undertake a range of qualitative developments in work and training provision in Mountjoy and the Training Unit. Broader issues of policy and planning within the prison system and engagement with the wider community also impinge on the progression focus of the CTEC Initiative.

**Issues Requiring Action**

Arising from the discussion at the workshop a number of issues requiring action were identified. Moreover, it was generally agreed that these issues are inter-related and that action on all is required if we are to build a more effective system supporting the

inclusion of prisoners and ex-offenders in employment and society.

**Developing Education and Training Provision**

High quality education and vocational training in prisons is vital in meeting the demands of the employment market and in counteracting the factors limiting the employment prospects of ex-prisoners. There must also be greater recognition of the importance of education for personal growth and social participation. As well as aiming at employment, other goals should be emphasised such as building self-confidence through skills, applying skills to the home situation and to relationships with individuals and society.

The need for an increase in the number of places and facilities available for education and training, particularly in Mountjoy Prison is a priority for action.

**Critical Review of Prison Education Provision**

The evolution and underlying philosophy of prison education in Ireland at first emulated second level education but gradually evolved its own content, methodology and approach in response to the specific needs of prisoners. The approach to prison education can be best described as an Adult Education approach.

It is estimated that about 50 per cent of the prison population participate to some extent in prison education. Participation rates vary in different prisons depending on educational accommodation, which is particularly inadequate in Mountjoy male prison.

There is a need for a critical review of prison education provision and the concept of prison education. Particularly, in light of the changed circumstances within the prisons due to the peace process and the enhanced employment possibilities given the level of employment creation in the economy.

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**Sentence Management**

If effective interventions are to be made there is a need for positive sentence management.

*A national policy on sentence management needs to be implemented to ensure effective education / training provisions.*

The policy objectives of sentence planning and positive sentence management have not been implemented in the prison system (with the exception of the Sentence Review Group for long term prisoners). Interruptions to training and education, lack of follow-up and support for those who complete drug treatment and *ad hoc* releases without planning and consultation with welfare officers, can undermine the beneficial effects of these services for prisoners. These are issues that need urgent attention.

**Justification for funding Education and Training Provision**

There is a need for information on *what works*, and measures of success that enable an assessment and monitoring of results in order to determine the justification for providing education and training within the prison system.

## Workshop 2

## The Employment of Ex-Offenders

The purpose of this workshop was to examine, from a variety of perspectives, the issues arising in relation to the employment of ex-offenders and to identify ways to increase the employment prospects of ex-offenders. The importance of this issue was highlighted in contributions to the panel session where it was noted that the inability to obtain employment is a major factor contributing to a return to crime. It was also noted that the present economic situation of rising employment presents possibilities to address the employment of ex-offenders in a manner not possible when unemployment was considerably higher than at present.

The factors known to influence the employment prospects of ex-offenders arise on the demand and supply sides. The former includes employers' attitudes toward applicants with a record of offending. In this regard, it must be noted that evidence of reliability and the availability of references from previous employers play a particularly important role in the recruitment decisions of employers. These may not be available in the case of many ex-offenders. On the supply side, the low educational and skill level of many ex-offenders are clearly a barrier to obtaining good quality employment. Without access to education training - both in-prison and following release - that is relevant to accessing jobs in the current labour market many ex-offenders seeking employment will experience considerable difficulties.

A further factor is the capacity of mainstream services such as the Probation and Welfare Service and the range of training and employment support agencies to support ex-offenders in their efforts to find employment. Finding ways to improve the

employment prospects of ex-offenders clearly involves addressing the above issues in an innovative an effective manner.

The workshop was facilitated by John Kilcommins of the Probation and Welfare Service. A number of inputs were made to stimulate discussion at the workshop. These were by Alan Flood who is a participant in the *Pathways* project, Jimmy Kinahan who works with CONNECT a support agency working with employers, and Martin Currie who works with Apex Scotland. A number of employers also contributed actively to the workshop.

Workshop participants included ex-offenders, employers, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform personnel, health board officials, probation and welfare officers, teaching staff from the prisons, researchers, Integra project personnel and Local Employment Service personnel. Participants presented their views on what needs to be done based on their own experiences. The following is a summary of the main issues discussed.

**References and Application Forms**

Being an ex-offender creates a number of barriers for people when seeking employment but a lack of references and difficulties in accurately completing application forms are two very practical barriers that arise.

The lack of a recent reference from an employer was identified as presenting particular difficulties. This was acknowledged by both employers and ex-offenders. Ex-offenders frequently have no one to vouch for their skills, or experience, or their character. Employers stated they need a basis to support the ex-offenders job application. The fact that prison is seen mainly as place of punishment rather than as a place of rehabilitation where skills and experience relevant to work can be acquired compounds this situation. Also, it was noted that when seeking employment, particularly in small towns, the Gardaí, can be influential as employers may seek information about the prospective employee from them. Furthermore, if the ex-offender has never had a job the only people that can give a reference are prison or probation

and welfare personnel and this often only highlights the ex-offenders record and thus can reinforce prejudice.

A further problem arises from the use of application forms that request information from applicants regarding offences. This places the ex-offender in a dilemma. The general consensus was that many ex-offenders do not report their convictions or time spent in prison as they believe that this will result in rejection.

On this point Alex Currie of Apex Scotland reported on the work of their project. They are working with employers in the public and private sector to develop recruitment strategies that place an emphasis on risk reduction. They provide education and training services to employers that enable them to introduce and sustain non-discriminatory risk reduction recruitment policies. He also emphasised that these are marketed on the basis of the mutual benefits of such recruitment policies to companies and ex-offenders. In this regard he pointed to the importance of not appealing to the social conscience of employers but to their commercial sense and, particularly in times of labour shortages, to the value of demonstrating that risk reduction recruitment policies involving the employment of ex-offenders makes commercial sense.

One practical recommendation to address some of the difficulties experienced was to seek a change in present legislation to make provision for the eradication of an ex-prisoners record after a specified number of years, the latter depending on the nature of the offence.

**In-Prison Education Services**

Workshop participants, and ex-offenders themselves in particular, agreed that there is a certain amount of peer pressure not to get involved in education and training courses while in prison. However, it was also acknowledged that many prisoners have a problem with basic education - literacy and numeracy – and that this was a major barrier to obtaining employment, particularly employment capable of providing a reasonable wage. The courses

in prison often provide the first opportunity to do something about this. However, a number of difficulties were identified – lack of facilities, poor motivation, temporary and early release, and more generally lack of assessment procedures and sentence planning and management.

Addressing the basic education needs of prisoners was seen as a first step to ensuring that prisoners can progress and get qualifications and the need to make links with outside agencies so that prisoners can continue to study on release.

**Lack of Support for Prisoners on Release**

There was general agreement that there are very few programmes or supports for prisoners when they leave prison.

*I live in the inner city of Dublin, beside Mountjoy prison and I was amazed that there was nothing for prisoners, that people walk out of prison with no job, no programme.*

As a result even if ex-offenders are ready, willing and able to seek employment they are at a disadvantage as they have nowhere to go or are unaware of the services that are available which give information and help with preparing a CV, doing application forms and preparing for interviews. Furthermore, for those ex-offenders who are not employment ready, there is no support to assist them to attempt to enter the workforce – for example, through training - and as a result many feel they have no alternative but to return to crime.

*When I came out I went back to same thing - you can get used to prison, the way of life.*

**Finding Suitable Jobs**

Many prisoners come from areas where there is high unemployment and these are the areas that they return to when released. This creates a problem both in relation to finding work and experiencing prejudice as a result of address.

There is therefore a need not only to explore the issue of job creation in disadvantaged areas but to tackle prejudice.

**Making links with Employers**

A number of examples of projects where links with individual employers are being sought as a way of securing employment for ex-prisoners were presented and discussed. Probation and welfare officers in the workshop stated that they are making links with employers. However, they expressed concern that this is sometimes very basic work and also that it is time consuming.

The Ballinasloe Training Workshop – discussed during the panel session - was presented as an example of an effective model. The workshop offers training and work placements for ex-offenders. Many of the participants get work after the placement and the fact that support was provided after the placement was identified as important.

One employer, who employs ex-offenders emphasised that he gets a lot out of it. His employees come to him with their personal problems and with a little attention and time these can usually be sorted out. As a result there is a good working environment, provided you ensure you really give people a second chance: *when you give people a second chance you do not throw the book at guys when you find something is missing.*

It was suggested that the fact that there are now skills shortages means that there might be more support for work directly with employers.

**Conclusions**

While there are many barriers to employment for prisoners and ex-offenders, many comments made at the workshop pointed to the fact that the greatest barrier is the perception held by the general public and employers that prisoners do not change. This needs to be tackled by a programme designed to change negative attitudes and promote a positive image of the potential benefits of

employing ex-offenders – benefits for the employer, the ex-offender and society.

This coupled with the fact that many prisoners have low self-esteem suggests that programmes are required that will help prisoners to develop positive self images, realise their own potential and open up alternative choices for them. Also, the need for programmes that will help to make young people become aware of the fact that a record and time in prison will *wreck their lives* was suggested as a preventative measure.

Finally, there was a general acknowledgement of the value of partnership approaches involving employers, statutory agencies, and voluntary and community organisations. Related to this, there is a need for greater linkages between all of those involved in providing supports and services to assist ex-offenders find and retain employment.

## Workshop 3

## Developing Empowering Practices

Empowering practices are about promoting the active involvement of people in defining the nature of their problems and in devising solutions to them. Working with people in a manner that is empowering involves recognising that people have insights and experiences concerning their situation that are a resource to be mobilised in developing effective solutions. Among the reasons for the current level of interest in empowerment is that mainstream approaches often fail to reach or effectively support people experiencing social exclusion.

The aim of this workshop was to explore the nature, relevance and effectiveness of empowering practices. This was done by looking at and discussing the practices being developed and implemented in three projects working with people who have either been in prison, are at risk of going to or returning to prison, or who have partners or members of their family in prison. An additional feature of all of these projects is that they attempt to respond to the wide range of difficulties being experienced by the people with whom they are working. These problems include a lack of information on statutory and community based supports, difficulties accessing education and training programmes, housing and transport problems, social welfare issues, and personal difficulties such as addiction, lack of confidence, being unemployed, and being in poor physical or mental health.

The workshop was facilitated by Tom Ronayne of the Integra Support Structure. Inputs to the workshop were provided by three projects: *Tallaght Area Response Getting Employment and Training For Offenders – TARGET* (Catri O'Kane and John Carroll); the *Dillon's Cross Project* (Lena Cronin, Phil Deane, and

Breda O'Reilly) and the Merchant's Quay project – *From Residential Treatment to Employment* (Liz Cunningham and Linda Lynch).

Participants in the workshop included personnel from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Probation and Welfare Officers, Prison Officers, a representative of the Irish Penal Reform Trust, ex-offenders, project personnel working with prisoners and ex-offenders, representatives of community and voluntary organisations working with prisoners and ex-offenders, a representative of the European Commission, and a representative of EUROPs – the Technical Assistance Office of the European Commission for the EMPLOYMENT and ADAPT Initiatives.

**Workshop Presentations**

**Catri O'Kane described *TARGET*** as a community based project that is working with young offenders with a view to enabling them access education, training and employment. The project works with 15 people at any one time.

In her presentation Catri described the underlying philosophy of the project as being *participant led*. This guides the project in terms of what it does, how it organises and plans activities, and how it develops and implements policies regarding behaviour and attendance. Being participant led means working with participants in an empowering way: *working in a way that results in participants becoming more powerful*. This, in turn, involves enabling participants to recognise and develop their potential, providing them with information, recognising their rights, and sharing power with them.

Catri emphasised that *sharing power* must be real if it is to be empowering. Catri illustrated this in terms of the practices of the project regarding programme development and establishing policies regarding such issues as attendance, using project facilities, and personal behaviour in the project. For example,

through the provision of taster programmes on a wide range of topics participants were allowed to construct a meaningful programme for themselves. This was done on the basis that *participants are the experts on themselves and on what they need.*

Catri concluded by noting the importance of mutual respect, being open in terms of constantly questioning our assumptions regarding participants' needs, and promoting equality as aspects of working in an empowering manner.

John O'Carroll, giving a participant's perspective, pointed to how the project had enabled him to begin to think about a life without resorting to crime. *TARGET* engaged him in a way he had not experienced before – *I learned how to relax and stay in one place.* This provided a platform for him to identify his aspirations – to work as a gym instructor. John pointed to the group dynamic in *TARGET – its up to us to make it work – we try to be there not just for ourselves but for everybody in the project.*

**Lena Cronin, in her presentation, described how the *Dillon's Cross Project*** evolved from a response to the difficulties that many prisoners experience in returning to their families and communities after release. Initially, the project worked with men to prepare them for release but now it works with prisoners and their partners as well as the relatives of prisoners.

Lena illustrated the severe relationship difficulties that are experienced by prisoners with a story and a poem. The story concerned the life of one prisoner – Billy - and the poem was the *Ballad of Reading Gaol* by Oscar Wilde. Lena pointed to the empathy that prisoners have with the poem and particularly the line – *for each man kills the thing he loves.* Billy is now struggling to change. This has involved recognising the *hurt and misery* that he has caused, that he is an alcoholic, that he has a literacy problem, and that he is violent. What Billy wants is *help and help now, it will be too late for me when I walk through the gate.* Lena pointed to the fact that Billy's plea is to *a system that is understaffed and overworked.*

Lena then described the work of the *Dillon's Cross Project* as *the pursuit of meaning and empowerment through education, education in its full sense of leading and enabling each individual to reach their full potential.* This informed all of what the project did. It was this that also led the project to become more engaged with the partners and relatives of prisoners as their initial approach in only working with prisoners was *creating a divide - there was nothing for the partners and relations of prisoners.*

The project now runs programmes specifically planned to meet the needs of women who have relatives in prison. These are also geared to enabling the women access further training and employment. Philomena Deane and Breda O'Reilly, both participants in the *Dillon's Cross Project*, described their experiences of these programmes in terms turning their lives around and getting back the self-confidence to get on with their lives.

**Liz Cunningham described the facilities operated by Merchant's Quay** for drug users. These include a contact centre for chaotic users, a stabilisation centre that caters mainly for people on methadone, St Francis' Farm which is a long-term therapeutic community, a training centre providing training for staff from the Merchant's Quay and other organisations, and a residential facility providing a 12 week programme including detox.

The Integra project operated by Merchant's Quay – *From Residential Treatment to Employment* - focuses on providing bridging mechanisms for former drug users into mainstream education and training as well as employment. It is a holistic programme. Elements include addressing personal development and motivational issues, providing practical assistance in relation to accommodation and welfare issues, developing education and training awareness, and work experience.

The Integra project is *participant centred.* It is really geared to enabling individuals identify their own needs and make plans for the future. The process involves groupwork and one-to-one

sessions. On empowerment, Liz commented that: *The issues around empowerment for us are dealing with things that many of us would take for granted. For example, most people who have been using drugs for many years never had a real job, they have no idea of what this might be like. We also place a lot of emphasis on getting continual feedback from participants so that we can modify our programme and ensure that it is meeting their real needs.*

Linda Lynch emphasised that the Integra project was responding to the fact that it is not enough to be working just to ensure that former drug users remain drug free. A holistic response is required that addresses all of the other issues in people's lives, even when they are drug free. This is crucial to preventing relapse and this is where the Integra project is focused.

**Workshop Discussion**

The discussion following on from the presentations highlighted a number of issues and areas where further action was required.

First, there was a consensus that the work of the three projects was meeting real needs in a manner that was not being done by mainstream services. The projects were not just filling a quantitative gap in service provision but a qualitative gap. The main issue arising, however, was that these projects are small scale and only deal with very limited numbers of people compared to the scale of the overall problem. There is a need to expand the availability of such projects.

Second, workshop participants considered that as well as a lack of existing services for prisoners, their relatives and ex-offenders, there were substantial gaps in the information available regarding what services and projects were actually in operation, both in the statutory and non-statutory sectors. This needs to be addressed through the provision of pre-release courses providing information on what supports are actually available. In this regard, lack of

information was identified as an important aspect of being disempowered.

The third issue was the severe impact that factors outside the control of projects have on the lives of their participants. Projects can work to empower their participants but much of the personal progress made by participants can be undone if they are unable to access employment due to the presence of discrimination or cannot get a home due to a shortage of housing. The issue of accommodation was singled out as being of particular importance and one that requires urgent attention.

Finally, there was a discussion concerning the use of language and the concept of empowerment. Most workshop participants stated that they did not use the word empowerment in their day to day work with participants and that their participants were unfamiliar with the word. Despite this, most workshop participants agreed that they were familiar with what empowerment stood for, they were familiar with the practical realities of being disempowered, and what it was to work towards empowering people. As stated by one workshop participant, *we should not be afraid to use the big words (e.g., empowerment), they're good words, but we need to ensure that everybody knows what they mean.*

# 5

# *Closing Session*

## Feedback from the Conference Panel

## Selected Quotations from the Afternoon Panel Session

*As a prisoner, I am glad to hear that people are willing to help and that they have good ideas, but if they could just put those ideas into practice. It is fine talking about things, but we are going to have to do something about it. You can have conference after conference after conference but it's not going to make a difference if you don't do something about it.*

*Groups like Connect, Pathways, the Dillon's Cross Project, the supports these are giving, these are things that we need. These are things that are going to help us to stop re-offending, to stop going back to prison. I think there should be more such groups.*
(Michael Riordan)

*The thing that struck me most about the conference today is that it is great to see everybody involved here, that prisoners are actually getting a voice and hopefully in the future we'll be able to work with the prison officers to change things. It takes courage from all of us to come together to change and people can change. I'm living proof of it.*

*It is great to see community groups and people getting up to empower themselves and put pressure on different people, especially Ministers and the Government, to do something about tackling the problem. It's good to see everybody here that's interested in giving prisoners a chance because the problem won't go away if you have your blinkers on. It's just going to get worse and worse.*
(Jason Bollard)

*The one thing that struck me is the need to be aware of the relevance of what is going on within the prison system and what is going on the in the world of work outside, and the importance of developing linkage between the two. There are so many different agencies and different groups engaged in the same task from different perspectives. A year ago I would say that a conference like this would have been a little bit beyond the conception of many of us. It seems to me too that it's important to take away from a conference like this, practical and tangible things to do, particularly at the point when the offender is leaving prison. We need to offer supports at that point.* (Martin Hickey)

*It is really crucial that the new Prisons Agency comes into force because it is a tangible structure that will allow far better management along with a Director of Sentence Planning and Rehabilitation. This would help change attitudes inside the prison, outside the prison, within the Department of Justice and the Department of Finance, and of course in the community. If the Agency is brought about, some attitudes will have to change and this will help prisoners a great deal more than they are being helped at the moment.* (Valerie Bresnihan)

*When we talk about the employment of offenders and about the training of offenders, whether they're in custody or in the community, I think all of us who are in the public service are at a great disadvantage. What we are doing is asking the private employer to take on people that we ourselves in the various agencies of state are not able to take on. Any person who has offended at any time in their lives cannot be employed in the public service. Therefore, we are asking somebody to do something that we won't do ourselves. I think that's a great disadvantage to us. I think we have to change that.* (Martin Tansey)

*We know that communication is a major problem in Mountjoy - communicating information about people's rights, about opportunities, about a whole lot of issues. Communication between the various people working there and the prisoners is also important. But communication is something we can do*

*something about ourselves, which is often the best thing to be working at, the things you can do something about.*

*I learnt today that we have to become far more pro-active in Ireland in relation to getting out there and confronting, advocating, and looking for work and contacts with employers and other helpful agencies. Projects like the Connect Project in Mountjoy and Pathways are certainly helping us to start that.*

*Identifying the needs of the people that count most is very important. That is, as has been said by some of the lads themselves, their own particular needs, the prisoners' needs. We're too quick to start imposing our solutions on people and we cannot impose solutions on anybody. We've got to ask them, we've got to get their consent, and we've got to take on board who they are and accept them for what they are. It's only at that point that you can start working with them.*

*Overall, and somebody has already said it, it's about action, really doing something about it. We have huge numbers of people who have huge problems and they end up in prison. In a big number of cases it's not the criminality that's the problem. Many have other personal and family and social difficulties that they had growing up that are problems and they have to be tackled.*

*Also, we need pressure groups as we can't do it all from within. We need groups and people, like the Irish Penal Reform Trust, to get out there and confront us. I think every public service needs to be confronted.*

*The final point I want to make is that there is huge value in looking at each individual and offering them help rather than generalising and throwing everybody into the one basket. I think that we have got to go back to the individual.* (John Lonergan)

## Closing Address

## Paul O'Mahony

I am sure that everyone will agree that the initiatives and the work of Integra and associated groups, that we have learnt about today, are very important and highly creditable.

In the first place, the full inclusion of prisoners and ex-offenders in the target group for the Integra programme is of the utmost significance for people that have often been regarded as the incorrigible, irredeemable misfits of society. The inclusion of offenders and ex-offenders is also a very positive reflection on the direction of current social policy in Europe and Ireland. It is not so long ago that the dehumanising doctrine of "less eligibility" became a king of orthodoxy in the US.

The doctrine of "less eligibility" holds that the imprisoned guilty are less deserving than the least deserving of society's officially innocent citizens and should, therefore, receive less of the benefits provided by the state, by way of conditions, services and opportunities. There is a kind of harsh Hobbesian – war of all against all – logic to this doctrine. After all, who could argue that an imprisoned burglar or rapist deserves to be better housed, fed, trained, and entertained by the state than a severely handicapped child. However, while spending money on offenders may draw attention to major shortcomings in other areas of state provision, the view that prisoners are deserving only of punishment is clearly short-sighted and morally untenable.

The purely punitive approach simply does not work. Imprisonment has little or no deterrent effect and often has a powerful criminogenic effect, confirming a person in an increasingly criminal lifestyle. But the purely punitive approach

is also blind to the important root causes of crime that lie in the structure of society and particularly in gross social inequities. The disastrous results of "less eligibility" are obvious in the US penal system, where appalling overcrowding, inhumane and brutalising conditions and a near total loss of faith in rehabilitation have contributed to the creation of a rapidly growing criminal underclass of alienated, hardened, resentful and dangerous people.

In Ireland and Europe, we recognise the moral bankruptcy and practical futility of policies that purposefully set out to exclude offenders and deny them basic rights and any opportunity to fulfil their potential as full members of society. The Integra programme is clearly based on a philosophy of inclusion, inclusion even of those who have wilfully chosen to be anti-social. It is a very positive, practical attempt to put flesh on the bones of Rules 65 and 66 of the European Prison rules, which call for conditions of imprisonment fully compatible with human dignity and fully consistent with acceptable, general standards in the community. These rules also echo the Integra philosophy by encouraging the maintenance of contacts with outside society and the provision of all the remedial, educational, moral and spiritual resources that will tend to minimise the detrimental effects of prison and improve prospects of successful resettlement after release.

The thinking behind this approach is underpinned by the key insight that a large majority of our prisoners have become involved in a criminal lifestyle in part because of the accident of their birth into families and communities that find themselves chronically marginalised and disadvantaged within the broader structures of society. The rejection of "less eligibility" approaches, then, is premised on an acceptance by society as a whole that it has a responsibility for some of the conditions, which shape criminality, much as it has some responsibility for more obviously blameless expressions of disadvantage like childhood poverty.

Another impressive aspect of the projects we have heard about is their realism. There are several strands to this. Most obvious, perhaps, is the provision of realistic levels of funding for these

important pilot and lead projects. There are few things more frustrating than good initiatives withering or fading away because of lack of essential funds. A really useful level of funds has been made available, but the manner of disbursing funds has also been improved.

We are all aware that the last decade has seen a sea-change in the way the funds, provided by Irish or European tax-payers, are spent. There is a new recognition of the need for oversight not just by the administration, whether Brussels or Irish central government, but by affected groups and the people as a whole. There is a new emphasis on value for money and on solid proof of achievement. Very much aided by the technological revolution, what has emerged is a more rigorous and clear-sighted discipline, governing the management and evaluation of government and EU spending. The projects described today have clearly gained both from the availability of realistic levels of funding and from this new discipline, in setting and clarifying goals, in identifying both obstacles to progress and effective strategies for making programmes work, and in subjecting the whole process to careful evaluation.

An unexpected, somewhat paradoxical result of the high-tech driven, computer and communications revolution of recent years is that the human and social sciences have come to play a much more influential and relevant role in social policy. Insights from the human and social sciences now make a valuable contribution to the definition and analysis of social problems and to the development of solutions. Computerisation and the new rapid forms of communications have enhanced the level of organisation and sharing of knowledge, and so, have helped identify and mobilise a cumulative body of tried and tested knowledge about how social systems work and how humans work psychologically – as individuals and as members of groups. The *Trialogue* definition of a core group of generic skills, spanning mathematical applications, communications, issue resolution, interpersonal skills, self-managed learning, health and safety awareness, and information technology, is an excellent example of this more informed, holistic approach. The *Trialogue* definition addresses

personal and social issues as much as sellable vocational skills and rightly aims at a more rounded individual who will be confident, flexible and capable of self-directed learning. In the context of preparing offenders for employment, I believe this is the most realistic and viable approach and the one most likely to succeed.

A third very valuable aspect of the initiatives, discussed today, might be summed up by the two words of engagement and commitment. In the approach adopted, there is a frank acknowledgement of a chronically neglected and mismanaged problem. But while there is an awareness of the immense size and complexity of the problem there is also a refusal to be overwhelmed or defeatist and a sense of confidence that seemingly immovable obstacles to real progress will eventually yield to the right kind of effort, based on sound analysis and the right set of principles.

Since the beginning of the modern penal era, with its focus on custody rather than transportation or corporal punishment, there has been an often naïve hope that work and occupation might be the key to the rehabilitation of offenders. This idea has taken many forms from the benign to the harsh and punitive. The "moral treatment" ideal saw ordinary productive labour as having an intrinsic redemptive value. Regimes centred around work and activity were thought to instil good social attitudes along with good work habits. Some penal systems, however, have been indifferent to the effects on prisoners and have sought only to be economically self-sufficient by relying on the labour of inmates. Others have sold prison labour on the open market with undisguised capitalist zeal.

These approaches reduced the imprisoned to mere economic units but were sometimes so successful that they led to bitter protest by free workers' unions and the consequent concentration of prisoner labour in areas of work of low skill and in the control of the state, such as the sewing of mailbags and the manufacture of car registration plates. But labour has also been used in a purely punitive, negative way to increase the misery of imprisonment, as evidenced in the use of the totally non-productive treadmills and

treadwheels and in the terminology of penal servitude and hard labour. The extreme example of the abuse of inmate labour is, of course, very graphically expressed in the truly damnable, uniquely and savagely ironic slogan that was placed over the entrance to Auschwitz concentration camp –"Arbeit macht frei" (work brings freedom).

All of this history has left a legacy of confusion and defeatism and made work for prisoners a fraught and contentious issue. However, this century has also seen a more genuinely rehabilitative focus on education and vocational training of offenders and a dawning realisation that, as one recent review puts it; "criminal sanctioning without the delivery of treatment services does not work". The problem is that although rehabilitative efforts have clearly assisted many individuals, penal systems, with few exceptions, have not been convinced or indeed been in a position to show convincingly that rehabilitation services do work.

One modern exception to this is the attempt by the Danish system to build regimes on the principles of openness, normalisation and responsibility. The Danes have developed regimes for drug addicted offenders that recognise that addiction treatment programmes although essential are not sufficient. They have recognised that channelling the energies of addict offenders into a broad range of productive and purposeful activity is equally important. The addict offender is best helped to overcome addiction by filling his day with non-stop, meaningful activity. More generally, however, ambivalence about or loss of faith in the role of occupation, combined with a massive problem of prison overcrowding and major shifts in the labour market and society-wide patterns of unemployment, have seen work and training for prisoners slip down the list of priorities to the point where, in Irish prisons at least, idleness rather than productive work has become the general reality. In these circumstances it is not surprising that Alex Paterson's famous dictum – "It is impossible to train men for freedom in a condition of captivity" has gained an undeserved credibility.

So the kind of realistic engagement and clear commitment displayed by these Integra projects is especially important as an antidote to the pessimism, confusion and fatalism that frequently undermines attempts at rehabilitation in prison and in post-release programmes. The fact is programmes that are grounded in an informed, detailed and sound understanding of the needs of individuals and in an appreciation of social and economic realities can work. It is vitally important to have, as some of the programmes described today have, a set of realistic goals and well-planned strategies for implementation in order to overcome what has been called the "optimism deficit".

Undoubtedly, the "optimism deficit" is as much a characteristic of individuals as of systems and needs to be tackled at the individual as well as the institutional level. Many offenders have experience of a lifetime of failure, particularly in educational settings. This will often have led to the internalisation of a belief that whole aspects of life are not for them and that pathways to personal development are closed to them. Often this negative outlook is shared within a family and a whole community and actively operates to hold back even clearly talented individuals and prevent them from taking advantage of opportunities that are actually open to them. It is clear how much greater a barrier the "optimism deficit" will be for the slow learner or the individual whose talents lie in directions that are not conspicuously valued by our current, highly competitive, points-driven educational system. The stress of Integra programmes on participative, partnership approaches and especially on the process of empowerment of the individual, understood in his or her own terms and not just society's, is absolutely essential to overcoming this attitudinal barrier.

Of course, it is also important not to oversell these initiatives and not to underestimate the profound problems and conflicts faced by any programme that sets itself the ambitious target of converting offenders into socialised, productive, content, non-criminal members of society. We must always be wary of the dangers of tokenism and of the danger that a commitment to assisting into employment those who have got into trouble with the law and have become troublesome to society is an adequate response to the

demands of social justice. Lead projects which display best practice must not be allowed to become a sort of unattainable ideal; rather their standards must become the norm for all projects and indeed for the system as a whole. Katherina Doherty's recent Evaluation Report on Training for Prisoners vividly demonstrates the great distance we have to travel in this regard.

The prison is already a repository for people who have fallen at various hurdles. As my recent survey of Mountjoy prisoners shows, offenders who end up in prison often have multiple handicaps that exacerbate and perpetuate each other. They are likely to have failed at the education system and at finding rewarding and fulfilling forms of employment. But they are also likely to be from an impoverished, dysfunctional family or a family under considerable social, psychological and economic strain. Huge numbers of Irish prisoners now have an opiate addiction and many of those that do not have a serious alcohol problem. Along with this, there frequently goes a burden of very serious illness and turmoil. These people, some of whom have found crime to be a satisfactory alternative route to the kind of self-fulfilment they cannot get in legitimate ways, are the target group or a large part of it, for the initiatives we are discussing today. Care must be taken that they remain the target group and that the rehabilitative services do not become yet another filter, creaming off the more manageable, more likely prospects and abandoning the rest to an increasingly desperate, bleak and no doubt criminal future.

Programmes under Integra are intended to empower the marginalised. Part of this process will involve putting in place structures that convey to the offender and ex-offender a sense of personal entitlement for services and a reasonable expectation of success in open society. It is obvious that, if this initiative is to reach all offenders, then it will be very expensive, because it will have to be comprehensive in the therapeutic, educational, training and personal development services it offers. It will also involve major change in social attitudes and structures. It is impossible to avoid the blaming, condemnatory aspects of criminal justice, but we will as a society, need to find ways of managing them that

permit us to see offenders as victims as well as victimisers. It has become common in our society, which is reaching for ever greater control of risks of all kinds, to conceptualise offenders in terms of their various risk factors for crime, such as addiction, school failure, family breakdown etc. What we must realise is that what we see as increased risk to the social order is in fact – from the perspective of the offender – unwished for personal loss and failure. The most hopeful path towards a solution, I believe, lies in a combination of the principles of restorative justice and an energetic commitment to the implementation of social justice. This approach would place offending in its broader community context and recognise the need to address not just the accountability of individual offenders but also the imbalances in our social structures that ensure that most of the offenders we severely punish are from a highly deprived underclass. In the long run, rehabilitative programmes will only be effective, if the individuals we call on to make reparation to their victims and to the community have a firm belief that broader society is also repairing itself and genuinely seeking a fairer distribution of its benefits and burdens.

Finally, by way of caution, it would be remiss not to point out that the world of work itself is rife with problems and, as the major social system for the often outrageously inequitable distribution of rewards and benefits, it is one of the most powerful contributors to the current inequalities of our society. I recently heard Peter Cassells, secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, describe work situations, in the era before our accession to the EEC, as often characterised by material hardship, psychological subordination and social tyranny. Despite improved conditions, holidays, health and safety regulations and legal protection of equality in the workplace and of employment itself, many of the available positions for people at the bottom of the ladder still do not differ greatly from the bleak picture painted by Peter Cassells.

The Integra initiative to better integrate offenders into society by helping them adapt to the world of work is a major step forward. But poorly paid, dead-end jobs are clearly not enough for anyone, offender or not. J.M. Barrie once quipped that "nothing is really

work unless you would rather be doing something else". By definition, this is likely to remain the case, but everyone should have the opportunity for work which will provide adequate reward and allow for a sense of pride.

ISBN 1 898148 13 9

Developing more effective approaches to preventing recidivism is among the major challenges facing the penal systems of the Member States of the European Union. Currently, this challenge is being addressed by developments such as the use of non-custodial sentencing, the introduction of positive sentence management, an increased emphasis on in-prison education services, and providing vocational training linked to employment preparation and support services.

Programmes aimed at preventing recidivism are increasingly being informed by a recognition of the strong links between crime and poverty and the association, in some countries including Ireland, between drug addiction and crime. Tackling these issues involves addressing all of the factors leading to the poverty and exclusion faced by prisoners and ex-offenders, particularly their lack of access to good quality employment. This requires developing multi-faceted and integrated responses to the multiple difficulties faced by prisoners and ex-offenders and ensuring that these are provided in such a manner as to empower rather than disempower prisoners and ex-offenders. It also requires taking action both within and outside of prison.

The Integra Conference - *Including Prisoners in Employment and Society* - provided a forum to examine developments concerning these issues and to discuss the lessons emerging from Integra projects in Ireland and other EU Member States that are working with prisoners and ex-offenders. The conference brought together a range of key actors to reflect on their experiences regarding what works and why? Three issues were singled out for specific attention. These are educational and training provision for prisoners and ex-offenders, systems to support the employment of ex-offenders, and developing empowering practices within and outside of prison.



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